

# THE LONDON READER

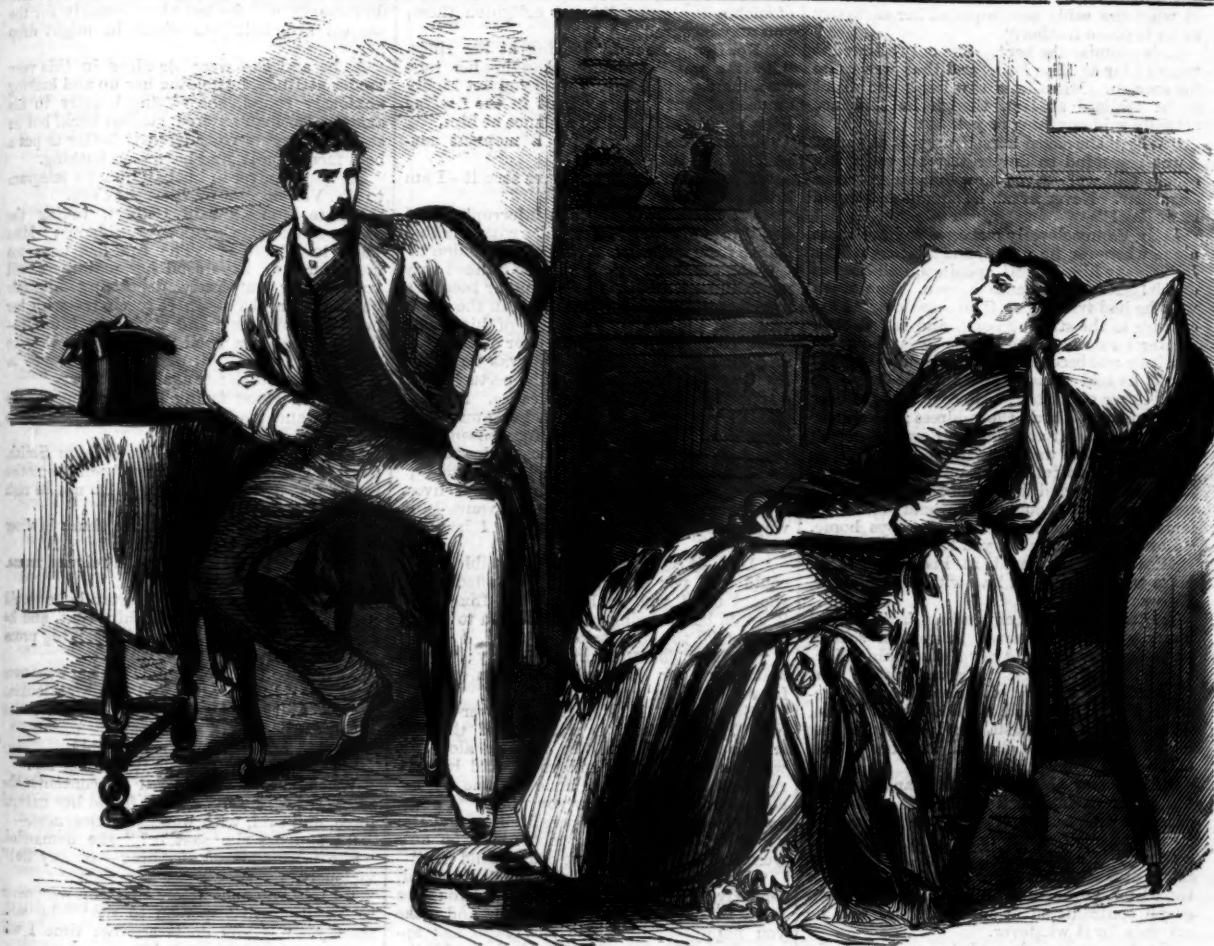
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["YOU SEE BEFORE YOU A RARE WICKED WOMAN—PENITENT AND SORRY ENOUGH FOR HER SINS NOW."]

## TWO MARRIAGES.

### CHAPTER XXXVI.]

Two or three months went by; "the Gordon-square murder" was now an old story, and had been eclipsed long since by other tragedies.

Miss Fane had taken up her abode under Lady Fanny's roof, as it gave her many additional facilities for seeing her cousin Gilbert. She was to all appearances a very mother to her two boys, and most passionately devoted to them both. This was patent to the whole household, and more than one of them had made the remark that "she would make a model step-mother!"

Gilbert began to see that he could not quarter these children on his aunt always—not that she had any objection, nor to the very handsome quarterly cheques paid into her bankers; but he liked to have them more to himself, in some kind of home of his own. But how, and where?

There ought to be a woman at the head of

it; and who was that woman to be? His mind dwelt reluctantly on Miss Fane. She was a slave to the boys as it was; she would be the very best person to replace their erring mother—the best for them; but query, would she be the best for him?

Scarcely; but, then, he could not have everything. Another young lady, that might suit him, might not care for them. Certainly, Lizzie had been most treacherous about that address—she had betrayed the miserable Georgie into Mr. Blaine's very hands; but then, had she not confessed, with sobs and tears to him lately, "that she thought that she was acting all for the best, and for his most important interests."

Thus he was muzzled; if he opened his lips tears (crocodile) came into her narrow light eyes, and she would sigh,—

"Gilbert, I did it all for the best—all for you. I may have been wrong; but, you see, she did not really care for you, much less the children," wiping her eyes in a plaintive manner. "She has made no attempt to see the darling boys, nor you; she has forgotten you, and you know she is a rich woman—not

bad-looking. She will sink her past life, as she did before, and marry again."

"The boys were certainly being spoiled," thought their father, with some uneasiness. "They were too much with women, and he only saw them when he came to lunch now and then at Queen Elizabeth's-gardens. They were too young to be sent to school. What was to be done?"

"Marry your cousin Lizzie," said his aunt, very promptly. "She has money—she is well-born—not too young and giddy—she has no secrets in her past, no fearful surprises in store for you! Marry her, and you will be a wise man. She will make you an excellent wife; and let me tell you, my dear boy, that it is not every one who would have you now, saddled as you are with these two children; and with such a strange experience in your past it is not every young girl who would care to be the real Mrs. Vernon!"

Her nephew said nothing, but coloured hotly, and dug his cane viciously into her good Brussels carpet. There was truth in what she said, though she had not presented it in the most palatable fashion.

It was not every one who would care to be his wife—he was no great catch now—he could not afford to be too particular, and there was no doubt but that the boys would be better under his own eye, and that Lizzie would have him.

So before he took his leave he told his aunt that he “did not wish to make up his mind in a hurry; he would never, never dream of marrying again, only for the sake of Alick and Jack, that he would promise her to think of what she said; but implored her earnestly to let it go no further.”

This promise she kept. She only allowed it to go as far as Miss Fane, and that was quite far enough. Miss Fane saw her hopes about to be realised at last, though he had not actually said anything as yet.

“Why,” she asked herself, angrily at times, was her mind so desperately set upon her cousin Gilbert? Even now he did not care about her. Never mind, he should and would come day!”

Lady Fanny cleverly managed to have them alone whenever he called, and although Miss Lizzie gave him several openings, still he was dumb! Never so dense a man. The truth was, he had tried more than once to bring his courage to the sticking point, and failed. No matter how charming Lizzie was, how exquisitely and becomingly dressed, how sympathetic, he told himself as a wife he knew he could never stand her! He could not get over that business about the address; no matter how she twisted it and twisted it down, it sprang up again. She was deceitful, and the other had been deceitful. All women were deceitful. He was glad he had no daughter, and now, on second thoughts, he would just set up house again alone, and take the boys home. “Better to bear the ills you know,”

Miss Fane wondered at his dilatoriness. Here was a legend in love with a vengeance. He was too bad.

A little paragraph, emanating from the pen of a certain society paper, under the head of “Approaching Marriages in High Life”: “We understand that Gilbert Vernon, Esq., of Alton Manor, Wiltshire, will shortly lead to the altar his cousin, Miss Elizabeth Augusta Fane, only surviving daughter of the late General Mowbray Fane, of Easting, Hampshire.”

Gilbert saw this in the club, and dropped the paper as if it had burnt him. He was seething with no end of questions, congratulations, and chaff, which drove him nearly into a frenzy. He stoutly denied the soft insinuation, and set down there and then and wrote the editor, requesting him to have this paragraph contradicted at once, as there was no grounds for it whatever.

He felt quite ashamed to go near Lady Fanny's, and only devoutly hoped that they had not seen the paper—vain hope. He was dining there that evening, and during the meal not a word on the subject had been uttered, nor had his aunt touched upon it during the few minutes that he and she had been in the drawing-room alone, and he breathed freely, but after dinner she went into a little back snuggery for her forty winks, when she did not like to be disturbed, and this left the cousins the other apartment to themselves.

She, Lizzie, was exquisitely dressed in a pale blue dress, with a square cut body and long train that lay behind her in soft folds on the carpet, as she leant her sharp elbow on the mantelpiece, and looked at her own face in the glass, then at Gilbert's. He was looking down into the fire. She was sure that he had seen it! Would he not speak now? He was going to speak. He looked up and met her eyes, and said,—

“Fancy to-morrow week being Christmas-day. I never thought of it till Alick reminded me.”

“Yes, how time flies,” she replied, sentimentally.

“Flee!” he echoed. “Crawl, you mean.”

“And yet it does not seem so long since that

strange Christmas two years ago,” she replied. “You remember our walking to church, Gilbert? What a lovely Christmas morning!—a real white world—and my pointing you out those footprints in the snow? And you were quite angry, were you not?”

“I remember it only too well. I have hated the name of Christmas-day ever since. Last year, thank goodness, there was nothing to remind me of it. I was up at a little mountain village in Japan, where they had never heard of such a day, and I did not enlighten them, you may be sure.”

“No, I suppose not,” looking at her rings. “By the way,” suddenly changing her tone for a more playful key, “were you not highly amused at that announcement in the *Looking Glass* about us?” darting a glance at him.

Gilbert's breath was for a moment suspended, and then he said,—

“Then I am afraid you have seen it—I am exceedingly sorry—”

“Why need you be?” she interrupted.—“I don't mind in the least if,” with another glance from under her eyelashes, “you don't.”

Gilbert was conscious that he minded very much indeed, and that he had never been at a more complete loss for an answer in the whole course of his life. This speech of his cousin savoured strongly of a plain offer of her hand in marriage. What on earth was he to do? Perhaps the lady noticed his perturbation, and assigned it to a wrong cause. She had had, as we know, a hint from her aunt—perhaps she interpreted silence for consent; for presently she said, in her most dulcet tones, and laying her hand upon his coat sleeve,—

“We have known each other all our lives. I know all the dreadful story of yours—and why should it not be, Gilbert? I have no objection.”

“I—I—it could not—it is impossible. If I could give you even a scrap of affection it should be, if you would have me, Lizzie, but it would be wronging you to ask you to marry me just for the boys' sake.”

“No, no,” she interrupted, eagerly; “I will marry you for their sakes, and you will care for me, then, for my own—”

“Stop—stop, Lizzie, it can never—never be. My very heart is withered, if there is such a thing. I shall be happier alone. I want no womankind, and you would bitterly repeat the day you had honoured me by becoming my wife. I know you would. I never was a specially good-tempered fellow, and I'm a regular bear now. I'm not fit to be any woman's husband—no one could stand me.”

“I will run the risk, Gilbert,” she said, tenderly; “I have always cared for you, you know I have, and I will reform you, and make you happy—and, as the paragraph has appeared, we may as well make the best of it.”

“But I have contradicted it most explicitly,” said Gilbert, emphatically; “and I cannot think who it was that took such a monstrous liberty with our names.”

“Contradicted it, have you? Oh!” in a tone of the keenest disappointment. Then, trying a new tack, and beginning to weep.—“It is no matter for you—a man, Gilbert—but, oh! it is a dreadful—dreadful slur on me. People—people will say you have jilted me,” now sobbing aloud, her shoulders shaking with emotion.—“they will say dreadful things, you know they will.”

Gilbert stared at his cousin in dismay. Matters were getting worse and worse, but he was resolved not to give in. No, he would not allow her to wring the fatal word from him, for it was an invasion of the usual laws of society—it was he that was asked to say “yes.” Lizzie should not put the fatal halter round his neck. No—he would hang himself first; he would be deaf to her sobs, blind to her tears—in stoicism was safety.

Miss Fane glanced at him through her fingers, and decided that now or never was the moment to give him the coup de grace. She was not going to lose Alton Manor and all the Vernon family diamonds just for a mere ridiculous straining at a gnat—she who

was fully capable of a whole camel! So she made a sudden impulsive gesture, as though calling the stars to witness her woes, and suddenly reposed her scented locks upon her cousin Gilbert's shrinking shoulder.

This, to him, was terrible. He would, if he dared, have thrust her rudely back, and let her fall upon the carpet; but she had become now as limp as a rag, and as heavy as lead.

He swore fiercely under his moustache awful maledictions upon all womankind, from Eve downwards, and looked about eagerly for the nearest armchair into which he might drop her.

As he and she were standing in this very tender attitude, he holding her up and looking anxiously round, she resting heavily in his arms, a footman entered, started back, but on second thoughts considered it better to put a bold face upon it, and have seen nothing.

He had a salver in his hand, and a telegram to Mr. Vernon sent on from the Club.

“Here, Jones,” said Gilbert, taking the orange envelope in his disengaged hand; “Miss Fane has fainted! The fire has been too much for her. Just send her maid here, will you?” now ruthlessly depositing his fair burden in a chair—an easy chair—with her head well-laid back, and saying to himself,—“That she was a good deal heavier than he would have believed, and he would not be caught alone with her again in a hurry.”

He then stood facing her, and opened the envelope and read the telegram, which ran as follows:—

“To G. Vernon, Esq.—From John Smith, Carlton Club, London.—I have seen the notice in the *Looking Glass* of to-day. Do not be rash—your wife is living!”

He read this over two or three times in sheer amazement. What did it mean?

John Smith was, of course, a feigned name. Who had sent it—had she?

“Do not be rash!” No, certainly he would not be rash; no need to tell him that, and he glanced surreptitiously at Lizzie lying prone in the chair.

As he glanced he observed that her eyes were wide open, like a cat's, and she was looking eagerly at the telegram that he held in his hand.

“What is that?” she said, feebly.

He answered by putting it into her lap.

When she had mastered its contents she recovered. She sat up and found her natural force, and said, with wonderful clearness,—

“I suppose she sent it?” she demanded.

“She is capable of anything—of any lie!” viciously.

“I told you once before that you were never to mention that person to me!” he said, sternly. “If you do it another time I will never speak to you again!”

“A pretty way you speak to me now! After such treatment of me, too,—after our marriage being in the paper—after all you said to Aunt Fanny. Oh! what wretches men are!” seizing the telegram and crushing it up in her hands, in a kind of frenzy. “I wish to goodness the whole race was extinct!”

“Ditto to your sex!” returned Gilbert, laconically. “And there is your maid. I sent for her, thinking that you might require her services; I'm not used to these fainting fits. Say good-night to Aunt Fanny, Lizzie, and I hope you will be all right to-morrow. You may give me that telegram, please,” holding out his hand for the crumpled ball of paper. “Good-night!”

So saying he walked across the room, opened the door, and went out, a bang downwards announcing his final departure.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Two days later Gilbert Vernon, who was still in London, received another telegram—again from John Smith. This one said—

“I have important news for you—I wish to see you to-day. Be at St. Clement Danes' Church at five o'clock, and follow my messenger.”



This came to the club at three o'clock, and during the next hour-and-a-half Gilbert was a prey to as many changes of mind almost as there were moments.

He had heard of people being carried away, and robbed by thieves under all manner of specious pretences—aye, not only robbed, but murdered, never heard of again. Still, this John might throw lights upon various gloomy passages of his life, passages that had been passed through within the last two years. He would venture. "Nothing venture, nothing win."

As the time drew near he grew impatient and restless. He took up a paper—he put it down—he went and looked in at the whist-tables, and came away—he took a turn into the smoking-room. He did not remain a moment—what though Skippy Trevor was making his hearers' sides ache with one of his capital stories!

It was now twenty minutes past four, and dark; but a fine, frosty evening. He would walk to the rendezvous. Accordingly, he put on his top-coat, a silk muffler, and taking a stout stick in his hand set out for his mysterious assignation.

He was the first—the first for fully a quarter of an hour. He began to feel cold, to feel impatient—to wonder if he had been made a fool of—to wonder if he might not as well go home instead of loafing there against the railings with every chance of being told to "move on."

Five minutes more and he would go; but ere the five minutes were spent a hansom dashed up at great speed. The horse all covered with foam, jerked on to his haunches, and a great, big, gaunt old woman, in a shepherd's plaid shawl and straw bonnet, descended and looked about her.

Seeing Gilbert she came up quickly to him, and said—

"Beg pardon, sir, if I'm making any mistake. Be you Mr. Vernon?"

"Are you John Smith?" he said, cautiously.

"That's it," she said. "It's not my name; but it will do—my real name is Ann Halliday. My niece wants to see you sorely, sir. Get in—get in," almost driving him before her into the vehicle.

The rattling over the loose stones and the roar of the other traffic almost entirely drowned their voices, conversation was impossible.

There was nothing for Gilbert to do but to wait with what patience he could till he saw the end of this odd adventure. This woman's niece, who could she be? He had never seen this hard-featured old person in his life before, and, moreover, unless his olfactory nerves deceived him, she smelt of gin.

"I never saw you before, sir," she roared into his ear; "but I did you a good turn once. I wrote to you from Hillford about a black cabinet. I dreamt the will was there—I knew it was somewhere—and I was right, though dreams, they do say, go by contraries. I was the old man's housekeeper."

"But what about your niece?" he shouted back. "What does she want with me? Where is she? Who is she?"

"She has a world on her mind. She has been talking to the priest all day. He said she was to send for you at once; not an hour, no, not a moment, was to be lost; a terrible wrong has been done to some one. My head is that bothered I don't know rightly who. Either it's you or it's a lady; but you will hear soon enough. We haven't far to go."

"And what's your niece's name?" he asked.

"Here we are," said his companion, as the hansom stopped in front of a row of cheap-looking, red brick, houses, with narrow little gardens in front of them, and green iron railings.

"I'll keep you to take me back," said Gilbert to the driver as he got out, with a view of making a good retreat in case of the worst.

"Aye, very well," remarked the old woman.

"He will be some time, but there's a comfortable house (meaning public) just round your corner. You come away in with me, sir; she's wearying to see you, that I know. She can't die with this on her mind, and I'm afraid it's something bad—I'm main afraid it's bad."

"But you have not told me her name yet," said her companion, following her into a very narrow little hall, lit by one dip candle in a tin candlestick.

"Her name!—oh! then much good her married name has done her—was a unfortunate name for her. Didn't I tell you her name was Blaine—Mrs. Blaine?"

Gilbert staggered against the wall as he heard this announcement. And had Georgie come to this—and was she dying? Was this drunken-looking old woman her aunt—this messenger she had despatched to hear her confession? Needless to tell him—he knew all—and dying—

He stood for a moment in a stuffy little parlour, whilst Mrs. Halliday climbed upstairs to announce him, and, as he stood there, the whole place, floor and ceiling seemed to reel with him—the small round table, the black horsehair sofa, the little clock, the white antimacassars, were whirling round and round in a giddy circle. He was obliged to sit down, and lean his head on his hands, to try and recover from this unexpected shock. As he sat there, he felt a heavy, claw-like grip on his shoulder, and a voice said—

"She's ready for you now. Don't say much, nor excite her more nor you can help—she'll hardly last the night out. Come on," imperiously.

And he did come on as desired. He groped his way up the narrow little stairs, and found himself ushered into a bedroom—a small, meanly-furnished apartment—no curtains to the windows, but there was a good fire in the grate, and beside it, sitting in a chair, propped up with pillows, sat a young woman, with the seal of death on her face—with awful, hollow, hectic cheeks, and hollow, glittering, sunken eyes—but a woman he had never, to the best of his recollection, ever set eyes on before in the whole course of his life.

The door was shut behind him, and he and this stranger were alone. He stood irresolutely, thinking that there must be some mistake, looking interrogatively at the shrunken figure near the fire, that gazed back at him.

"Come in, sir," she said, at last; "I know you well, though you don't know me. You see before you a rare, wicked woman—penitent and sorry enough for her sins now, and wanting to make amends to those she has wronged before it's totally too late."

"You are sure you are making no mistake?" said Gilbert, now taking a snat at some distance. "I'm sorry to see you, whoever you may be, so ill; but I think you are making some mistake."

"No mistake at all. I'm—my right name is Mrs. Blaine—"

Here she was interrupted by a frightful fit of coughing, and for fully three minutes gasped and gasped for breath.

"I'm all right now," she panted at last. "and please let me talk while I can. We did a terrible, terrible wrong to poor Mrs. Vernon—your wife! Peter did it for money, and he made me do it for nothing. Aye; Peter was a fierce man!"

"Do what?" demanded Gilbert, in a sharp voice.

"I'll tell you all in time. I was housemaid at the Blaine's, and the young gentleman, Mr. Peter, fell in love with me. His people was mad—mad, and I was sent about my business. However, it made no difference, for he knew where I went to, and we were married; here are our lines," handing a slip of paper which Gilbert reached for mechanically.

"Then Peter got into trouble and left the country, and left me, and I took service again. I rarely heard from him, unless asking for money; he came home to his people very poor, and hearing Miss Georgie Grey was to have a great fortune, he made up to her, as you know,

and married her on the sly. It was bigamy, of course; but he never expected I would turn up again, and he wanted her fortune sorely. Well, he was disappointed; it went to the Yances. He then gave out he was dead, never meaning to come home no more."

She paused for a moment panting like some hard-pressed animal.

"Well," she proceeded, "then Miss Grey—for she never was ought else, in spite of the jugglery at Portsmouth, when she was a poor foolish child—was married to you, and she would have heard no more of Peter, only for the coming in for all the money in the end, partly owing to a dream of my aunt's, the old man's housekeeper; and when Peter heard of this, of course, he craved for it, and back he came, as hard as he could, meaning to have what he called his share—meaning all. He had a kind of notion that you and Mrs. Vernon, being so fond of one another, would try to buy him off, to keep what he pretended was his secret, for your own sakes."

Here Gilbert breathed to himself half-a-dozen maledictions!

"For, as he knew, you were lawful man and wife all the time; but he made you think different, and you were easily persuaded, and what he called too proud and too proper to keep the matter quiet, and let things go on as usual. Besides, he said, she had a temper like a wild cat."

"Well, Peter broke up your home and made a lot of mischief, and got you out of the country, and then fell in with me. I was fond of Peter, and I made friends with him. I was in all his secrets; it was I as fetched her away that time; I'm—I was Mary Todd; she knew me as Miss Fane's maid."

"When he got her to Gordon-square—my! how she went on! She was just like a wild thing; she wanted to jump clean through the window, and, aye, she said awful things to Peter—he struck her! I told him it was a shame, and she a lady, and so delicate-looking, and not his wife, nor anything; but her mouth! it did bleed rarely; but she never cried, nor was a bit cowed—only fiercer than ever!"

"I see, sir, by your face, that this is a terrible hearing for you, and I've been a wicked woman. I thought of nothing but fine clothes and diamonds—her diamonds. I've them here; I sold her clothes, and her sealskin, and the stars, but I kept the necklet."

"We, Peter and I, were fine people, and kept a lot of company. I had a carriage and maids of my own, but she was a kind of conscience in the house, a skeleton in the cupboard, all the while shut upstairs."

"Peter, he and I, used to quarrel, and he drank at times just awful! and I—well, you must just know all first as well as last—I drank too, to drown care, as it were, and keep myself cheerful, for I could not be very cheery when I thought of that poor young lady upstairs!"

"She gave me letters for you to post, but I burnt them, of course—and how she would cry at times! cry and sob for her two little boys; but at last she got quieter—she stopped walking, walking, walking, and sobbing at night's and beating her hands on the doors! She used to keep me awake, I can tell you, many an hour! She got quiet and sullen-like, and then, it seems, somehow she got hold of the key and got away!"

"And is that all you have to tell me?" said Gilbert, now standing up, with a face as white as death.

"No, no—the worst is to be told yet," she said, suddenly covering her face with her hands; "but I was not myself when I did it," shivering as she spoke.

"Then"—in a low, hard-struck voice—"you did it?"

"I did," she returned, in a broken whisper. For a moment or two there was a dead silence.

This miserable woman, this dying creature, had killed her husband with her own hand.

Georgie was innocent! Georgie had been everyone's unhappy scapegoat.

“Georgie was his wife—his wife, who had been reft from him—from that wicked scoundrel whom Nemesis had overtaken on his own hearth, but whom Gilbert felt, as he looked back on his career, that he had deserved to swing by the hands of the common hangman.”

What could ever make up to Georgie for all she had suffered? And how was he ever to gain her pardon?

“I may as well finish!” gasped the miserable object before him. “One night Peter and I had an awful quarrel—partly about money, partly about a woman. He had been taking a lot of brandy—raw brandy; so had I. It was that. We got to high words; we got to blows. He cursed me; he called me vile names. He struck me; and I, filled with some kind of demon, turned on him with the nearest thing I could find. It happened to be a knife. I made for him, and missed him. I saw by his eyes he would kill me, and I struck at him again hard, and he fell. I did not know for sure if he was dead—at first I was afraid to look. I poured out a lot of brandy, and drank it raw; that gave me heart; it was like fire inside me. I went to him and pulled out the knife. He was dead! I threw the knife in the fire, and turned off the gas, and made my way to bed.”

“I was too deadened and stupid with drink to care if I was found out or not. I lay and slept like a log till morning, and then came the hubbub!—and she was missing. There was her footprint all the way down the stairs! ‘She had done it,’ everyone said; and I—no one dreamt of me.”

“I stayed up in my room as much as I could; and then I gathered all the money and clothes I could together, and went off in a cab. I never said where—not likely I would go back to that house. I was—you will think it strange—very sorry for Peter. I felt as if someone else had done it; but, then, I knew I had—his awful dead face looking up at me from the floor used to give me no peace at night. I seemed to see it in the dark, even if I shut my eyes. It’s quite true what people say about ‘murder will out’—you can’t keep it. I would have told, only I knew there was no need.”

“I was dying. It’s drink! I could not leave it off—drink is killing me. Can you not say a word to me, sir, to ease my mind?” she added, piteously; “just one little word.”

“What can I say?” he said, speaking with a visible effort. “My forgiveness will avail you nothing. But as far as it goes I give it to you. We are all sinners—some worse than others. It ill becomes me to refuse to listen to a fellow-creature who is to stand before another Judge so soon. But—no; I will say no more.” And, indeed, here his voice failed him.

“Oh, sir! Oh! if I could only see Mrs. Vernon I would be happier, if she would listen to me, not that I deserve it. I’m too bad, too wicked, for any lady to come and speak to. His Reverence told me to send for you. I believe that was his reason.”

“I can’t tell you anything about Mrs. Vernon.” How strange to utter the well-known name again! “I don’t know where she is, but I’ll go now, when I leave this, and try and find her. I have wronged her. I thought she was guilty of—that crime in Gordon-square!”

“Oh! sir, oh! Mr. Vernon, if you know her—”

“Yes, I ought to have known better; and now I have no time to lose. Mary Todd—I cannot call you by that other name—guilty woman as you are, you have raised the cares of life from my shoulders this evening. You have restored me my wife and children; you have made some amends at last. What can I do for you? Is there anything that I can procure, anything in my power? Name it!”

“You are too good to me, sir; nothing. And if I were starving I would not presume to take from you after all I have cost you. Here are two things—the diamonds, pulling out a case, and these marriage lines—no use to me now, and she might wish to see them. She will be glad to know that she never was any-

one’s wife but yours. I can well understand that!”

In five minutes more Gilbert, with the diamonds and the certificate in his pocket, was tearing off in the direction of the West-end of London, having slipped a good sum of money into Mrs. Halliday’s ready palm for the use of her niece, or for the funeral.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GILBERT VERNON need not have been in such a hurry after all, for when he got back to his club and began to sort his ideas, he remembered that he had no means of discovering his wife’s address (yes she was really and truly his own wife again), excepting through her bankers, and her bankers were not his bankers. Very early, in fact the moment the doors were open, he was on the spot, eager to see the manager.

After some delay he was shown into the manager’s private room, and found himself standing before a very polite, elderly man, with a most piercing pair of eyes, who looked at him critically, and asked “what he could do for him?”

These young fellows mostly came to borrow money, but that was not this gentleman’s errand. He wanted a lady’s address. This was something quite out of the common. He wanted the address of a nice, young, pretty customer—Mrs. George.

The manager hem’d and hawed, “and really very much regretted that such a proceeding was quite out of the question. Mrs. George’s address was given him in—ah,” with a sudden burst of candour, “he might say in confidence.”

You receive her letters and forward them, do you not?”

“Occasionally, I may say we do.”

“I must have her address. It is of the last importance,” said Gilbert, impatiently. “You will scarcely withhold it from me when I tell you that I am her husband.”

The manager now arranged his glasses, and scrutinised his visitor as keenly as if he were a doubtful cheque, and then said, “Mr. Vernon, I think,” taking up his card. “You are Mr. Vernon, I presume?”

“Yes, and the lady I wish to communicate with is Mrs. Vernon.”

“Oh, indeed! then in that case there is a mistake. We have no one of that name on our books.”

“It is the same person!” emphatically.

“It may be,” dubiously; “at any rate, we have no authority to divulge Mrs. George’s, alias Mrs. Vernon’s address. You had better go to your solicitors—”

“That’s not a bad idea; thank you,” quickly rising. “I will go to hers, since I can get nothing out of you.”

“Very sorry we cannot oblige you—but it’s not business,” bowing. “Ah! good morning.”

“What did the fellow want coming here bothering? A likely thing to give Mrs. George’s address. If they were to do so, she would probably withdraw her account like a shot, and it was a pretty big one. No, no! my fine young gentleman! you must find her for yourself—no easy matter!”

Her former men of business knew nothing whatever about her. Mr. Blaine had taken her affairs out of their hands. They were rather bitter about Mr. Blaine and his proceedings, and had, of course, had an inkling, very more than an inkling, of the terrible catastrophe in the Vernon family—the appearance of a said-to-be-dead husband upon the scene!

Now, Gilbert, in quick, short sentences, passionately poured forth to the family lawyers his own and his wife’s wrongs, lodged the certificate of Mr. Blaine’s first marriage with them, and considerably opened their eyes.

He told them that found Mrs. Vernon must be; no money, if it took every shilling he possessed, must be spared, nor a moment lost in setting the quest on foot that very day—nay, that hour!

His lawyers sat in amazement to see their usual cool, nay, rather nonchalant client in the character of a man full of fire, recourse, and energy, suggesting this, advising that, ordering the other thing!

Between his visit to the bank and his visit to the solicitors the morning was gone; but the day must not pass until Lady Fanny—aye, and Lizzie Fane—knew all.

They were toying with a delicate late lunch when Gilbert came in, looking unusually hurried and excited, and somehow different. What had happened? They would know soon enough.

“Yes, I’m starving; and if, as you say, there are plenty of hot outlets, I’ll be glad to see them. Aunt Fanny and Lizzie,” when the servant had left, “I cannot wait to tell you! It’s all right about Georgie; she was my wife all the time, and is still!”

This was by no means good news to at least one of his present audience. She became very pale and rigid-looking; but Gilbert, a stranger to any good news for so long, was full of his subject, needless to say.

“She has been the victim of a most awful conspiracy. That other man was nothing to her at all; he had a wife alive at the time!”

“How do you know this?” rather scornfully.

“Because she sent for me yesterday, handed over her marriage certificate, made a clean breast of it—the whole plot. It was to get Georgie’s money, nothing more!” he returned, speaking very rapidly.

“Gracious!” ejaculated Lady Fanny, “I never heard of such awful wickedness, never!—never in all my life!”

“But she did marry this—that Blaine!” put in Lizzie.

“Yes, went through the form at a registry-office when she was a silly girl. She never saw him again till he turned up at the Manor to levy black mail, his wife being in the secret.”

“They must have got a great deal of money from her?” in a tone of regretful conjecture.

“Pretty well—nine thousand pounds and nearly all her own jewellery! But what is that?—nothing!”

“Not the Vernon diamonds!” with a shriek.

“No! not the Vernon diamonds! But,” much hurt, “you seem to think more of them than her and all she has suffered, Aunt Fanny!”

“Oh! it’s been all very terrible, no doubt, and I can assure you my brain is in a whirl—one day Mrs. Vernon, another Mrs. George, then Blaine, then back to Mrs. Vernon again.”

“Mrs. Vernon she has been always. If I had not been a hot-headed fool I would not have given in so easily. I am sorry you and Lizzie have so little sympathy with one of your own sex, who has been such an innocent victim, and who has suffered so much, and so little compassion for me.”

Lady Fanny and Lizzie at once, now they saw how the wind blew, said a great many things from the lips out, only they were in their hearts very sorry that affairs had taken this most unexpected turn.

“Ring the bell, Gilbert, and we will go upstairs and have a comfortable talk—I really feel all of a shake.”

“Yes; and, if you don’t mind, I should like to have the boys down, Aunt Fanny.”

“You are never going to tell them?” in a tone of severe reproof.

“I don’t know what you think I am going to tell them. I shall tell them one thing that I hope will come true, and that is, that they will have their mother with them soon,” speaking in a freezing tone.

“Oh! yes, of course—I suppose so. Where is she?”

“I am sorry to say I do not know. I wish from my heart I did.”

“Have you not seen her since you came home?”

“Yes, once,” colouring at the mere recollection of that terrible interview in the Lover’s



Walk. "Ah! here you are," to Alick and Jack, "come here, and let me see you."

No need for the invitation—they were already climbing up like two young bear-cubs, and administering two or three hugs apiece.

Miss Fane sat opposite, and believed she could read her cousin's thoughts. When he put down Alick, and pushed the hair back from his eyes, he looked at him, she told herself, with fatherly pride, saying inwardly, to himself, "This boy is my heir, and a real Vernon." But to the younger he was different, if less proud. His look was more lingering, more tender. He looked into the child's deep grey eyes, and patted his curly locks.

"Ah!" she said to herself, with inward fury; "that is because he is so like her—anyone can see that he is Gilbert's favourite. Horrid little wretch, I always hated him and always will!" These pleasant sentiments she prudently kept to herself, and, calling over the two boys, kissed them effusively, saying, after they had gone to the windows,—"Dear children, what a difference this will make to them."

As to that hateful, awkward quarter-of-an-hour with Gilbert only three days ago, she was resolved to ignore it completely. Fancy, all but proposing to a married man!—but then who had ever expected this? She must be civil to her when she did come back, or there would be no more pleasant visits to the Manor.

When she did come back—aye, that was it. A week went by, Christmas was over, and still there were no tale or tidings of Mrs. Gilbert Vernon. The solicitors were helpless, private inquiry agents completely at sea. She appeared to have a faculty for hiding—practice makes perfect.

All the same, Gilbert went home, taking with him the two boys. The Manor was opened up in the old fashion, the house filled with servants, a nursery governess set to rule over the two children, and it was generally given out, in a quiet way, that it was all a mistake about Mrs. Gilbert all along, and the only thing that they wanted now was to have her at home once more.

(To be continued.)

**HOME AMUSEMENT.**—An excellent home entertainment is that of drawing together. In nearly every neighbourhood there is someone who knows something of the elements of this fine and valuable art. But if not, good prints abound, and much can be learned from them, if one only has sharp eyes. A good plan is for all the members of the family to try and draw a picture of some one thing—a chair, or a stove, a pile of books, a dog or cat. Or one may sit as a "model" and give the others twenty minutes in which to make a sketch. This often produces great merriment, and if persevered in, it sometimes happens that some member of the family develops real talent for drawing. The twilight hour may be improved by a recital of the events of the day. Each one should take his turn at this, and be obliged to make his description as interesting as possible. This exercise tends to accuracy, if you please, and develops the descriptive powers. Insist upon having the story duly embellished with details. Stirring ballads, fine poems, and choice bits of prose or verse chime in well at this hour, if recited. Choose specific subjects of conversation. Ask the children to tell all they know about mining, or painting, or new inventions. A pan of modelling clay, or of mud of the proper consistency, will entertain a group of youngsters for an evening, in modelling. The quick-witted boy or girl will make a rude framework of wire or wood, upon which to fashion and model his clay, so it will not tumble down. In drawing and modelling, young people observe a good many things not before thought of. Home talk and home occupations do much towards developing their minds and talents.

## SINNED AGAINST.

### CHAPTER IX.

MRS. RUSSELL and her daughter were very much amazed when they returned to Acacia Villa, and found the servant the only inmate of that select residence.

They came home late, and, to tell the truth, rather cross. The day had been fatiguing; no one had paid Margaret any special attention. The gentlemen they had hoped for as a cavalier had not appeared—in fact, the two ladies had been made to feel that with all their pretensions they were very little people indeed compared with the magnates of Mack-stone.

Their vanity and their feelings were alike wounded, and when they came into the little back sitting-room, and saw no preparations for supper, the storm burst.

"What is the meaning of this, Alice?" inquired her mistress, angrily.

The servant herself was uneasy. She had been persuaded to extend her stay at home; the minutes she had spoken of became hours. She had lingered, in fact, till the very last minute, secure in the belief that Miss May could not only never "tell tales," but that long-suffering damsel would herself perform her neglected duties.

Imagine her dismay when she returned about nine to find an empty house, the kitchen fire gone out, the tea-things unwashed on the parlour table, and no trace whatever of her mistress's niece.

"What is the meaning of this?" repeated Mrs. Russell. "Why don't you answer? Where is my niece? Why have you not got supper ready. Why are you in the dark?"

Margaret had been fumbling on the mantelpiece for the match-box. She found it and lighted the gas—a proceeding which revealed the tea-things and the large basket of un-mended garments.

Alice decided to clear herself by throwing the blame on the absent.

Mrs. Russell's anger could not hurt Miss May, seeing she was not there.

"If you please, ma'am, I just stepped out to see after those lettings and things you said I was to get for supper."

The errand had taken her five minutes. She had spent nearly as many hours at her mother's, but she did not deem it necessary to say so.

"That wouldn't take you long," said her mistress, tartly.

"I asked Miss May if she'd listen to the door and look to the kitchen fire, and she promised me she would. When I came back, ma'am, and rapped at the door, I couldn't make anyone hear. I knocked and knocked—which is as true as gospel—then I thought Miss May must have gone out herself, and I took a turn up the street; but when I came back it was just the same; and Mrs. Jones, next door, advised me to get in at the scullery window, which I did, and I've been lighting the kitchen fire ever since."

"And Miss May?"

The girl stood irresolute. May had often befriended her, and she was not ungrateful.

"Do you know where she is, Alice?"

"No, ma'am; I can't say I know."

There was an ominous stress on the last word, as though Alice desired to insinuate that though she might not have an actual certainty of the young lady's whereabouts, she had pretty keen suspicions.

"What do you mean? Speak plainly, girl!"

"I think she has just cleared off."

"Cleared off!"

"Runned away, ma'am. I've been into her room and it's all taxes and screws. Her black bag's gone, too, and lots of things."

Margaret looked at her mother. The result of that glance was the two ladies abruptly left the parlour and went upstairs to May's little attic.

It was just as Alice had said. The room was in great disarray. It was evident May had made a hasty toilet and left Acacia Villa in a hurry. On the plain, uncovered deal table lay a slip of paper with these words:—

"I shall never trouble you again. I am going where you will never find me. I was so miserable I couldn't bear it any longer. I don't think you'll mind, because you always called me a burden."

Margaret bent over her mother's shoulder, and they read the farewell letter together. Its effect on them was very different. Something very like a tear glistened in Mrs. Russell's eyes—Margaret looked full of triumph.

She was a strikingly handsome girl, but her expression was hard and cold. Her dark eyes glittered ominously as she read poor May's letter.

It would have fared badly with the girl if she had been there to feel her cousin's indignation.

"She has run away, Meg."

"Evidently!"

"What on earth can we do?"

"A great deal better without her than with her. May has been growing insufferable for a long time. She is not a child now; we really couldn't have kept her shut up any longer, and I'm sure we couldn't afford to dress her and take her about."

But Mrs. Russell was crying. Meg, who looked on her mother as a woman of sense, began to think she had been mistaken in her estimate.

"I can't imagine what you see to cry about," she said, indignantly. "One mouth less to feed—one less to clothe; that's what May's flight means!"

"I never loved her," said Mrs. Russell, slowly. "I always felt jealous of your father's affection for her, but I can't bear to think of her alone in the world!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Meg. "May's childish face and babyish ways will find her plenty of champions. It is horribly ungrateful of her to have gone off like this, but on the whole I think it a remarkable good thing for us."

"What will people say?"

"Nothing. If they do we can shut their mouths by saying she has gone to her father's family. She must have had some relations besides us."

"We are not relations to her."

Margaret stared.

"Do you mean she was not papa's niece? I always knew that there was something queer about her parentage, but I fancied her father has something to be ashamed of."

"I believe he was a very rich man. He was said to be."

"But was May your niece?"

"She was no relation to us."

"Then why did you keep her all these years?"

Mrs. Russell hesitated.

"You had better tell me," returned Meg.

"I will keep the secret carefully. Mother, you and I have always pulled well together, you know."

"I can't tell you her true name. I never heard it," went on Mrs. Russell, in a low, subdued voice, as though she were almost afraid the walls had ears and would overhear her. "I think your father knew it. May came to us more than twenty years ago a baby. Things were going very badly with us, and I thought two children would not be much more trouble than one."

"But you were paid for her?"

"I was handsomely paid. The whole of our income comes from that, Meg. You know I receive a certain sum half-yearly? It is the interest of the money invested long ago for May's benefit."

Margaret stared.

"And we made a little drudge of her. I think we have been foolish, mother. She may turn out a great heiress some day, then she could have made us quite rich people if she had been fond of us."

Mrs. Russell sighed.

"I never liked her. When she first came your father insisted there should be no difference made between you. He urged that the money which kept us was in truth hers, not ours. Then, as she grew older, he idolised her. It all seemed so much love taken from you. I grew to hate the child, and after your father's death I let her feel she was an interloper."

Margaret bent and kissed her mother. She was not demonstrative, but she understood a little of how the widow had sinned and suffered for her sake.

"We must try and find May," she said, decidedly. "What would you do if her parents appeared and wanted to claim her?"

"I should say she was dead."

Margaret stared. Hers was not a very scrupulous nature, but she had inherited from someone—her dead father, perhaps—truer notions of right and justice than her mother had ever known.

"I can't understand," she said. "You said it was a calamity to lose her. I should have thought you would have scoured the world through to find her."

"It wouldn't undo the fact that she had run away; if her friends turned up ever so I could never pretend I had played the part of a generous mother to her. No! I think she had better go."

"And what will become of her?"

The two women seemed to have changed places now. Margaret was anxious, her mother hard. Mrs. Russell had but one thought, one object in life—her own child. She had mourned over May's loss at first because she thought the loss of the money paid for her would affect Meg's comfort. A little reflection had shown her she might keep the money and yet be free from the girl whose presence she detested.

They went downstairs to supper.

"It is quite right about Miss May," the widow explained, condescendingly, to her hand-maiden. "I found a note in my room saying she had been obliged to go to her aunt in London on important business. I daresay she will not be back for some weeks."

Margaret listened and wondered a little at her mother's powers of invention. Her own feelings respecting May had changed; she was a selfish character, but she had a little of justice. She had grudged May's share of their home while she believed she owed it to their charity; now she learned the liberal payment made on behalf of the orphan, she rather fancied they had had the best of the bargain.

"What do you think has become of May?" she asked her mother when Alice had retired.

"I don't mean to think at all, Meg."

"But I can't help thinking of her, mother."

The words of her letter kept ringing in her ears.

"You had better go to bed," said her mother, composedly. "You are over tired, and will be better after a good night's rest."

But no good night's rest came to Margaret Russell; she hardly closed her eyes all through the silent hours; and when with the early morning a short, troubled sleep came to her, she awoke in a state of trembling terror, for she had dreamed she saw May drawn out of the river, her soft, brown hair dripping with water, her grey eyes closed, her sweet face cold and thin.

Mrs. Russell scolded her soundly when she mentioned her dream.

"Don't be foolish," she said, practically, "the girl has gone of her own free will, and whatever happens to her we are not responsible. Very likely her absence will prove a lucky thing for us; but you must put all such romantic notions as remorse out of your head. I shall tell Mr. Danvers and anyone else who asks that May has gone to London, and I will thank you not to contradict me."

But she had no chance of telling the fiction (for so she thought it, little guessing in her random shot she had hit the truth) to Bertram

Danvers, for he never came to call at Acacia Villa.

Early in the morning a pretty little note was brought by one of the servants from his hotel with profuse apologies that she had forgotten it the day before. The gentleman had left Mackstone, and disposed of the Russells in a few graceful lines of adieu and thanks for their pleasant society and hospitality, but without giving the slightest hint as to his returning to Mackstone to enjoy either any more, and holding out no hopes of future meetings.

Mrs. Russell laid down the little note with a sneer.

"I never liked that young man; he thought a great deal too much of himself."

Margaret said nothing. She had not loved Bertram; he had failed totally to touch her heart, but she had fully intended to marry him, and his sudden departure hurt her pride terribly, for she could not but suppose he had seen through her mother's hopes of landing him as a son-in-law, and amused himself at their expense.

For a fortnight things went on pretty much as usual, only though no one said so in words, May was bitterly missed. Alice openly gave notice she was not going to be made a slave of as Miss May had been, and coolly gave notice to leave when Mrs. Russell attempted to put Meg's tasks on her shoulders. There was no one now to smoothe the domestic machinery and make things go pleasantly; the domestic atmosphere grew very stormy, and it was a relief to Margaret when her mother said suddenly one evening,—

"Meg, I think I shall let this house and go to London."

Meg stared. London had long been the highest of her ambition.

"I thought you couldn't afford it?"

"If I let this house I should make a clear fifty pounds a year by it; that would bring our income up to two hundred pounds, and I think we could manage on that in London."

"It would be delightful."

"It is for your sake; you will never meet with a husband worth having here."

Mrs. Russell's speech seemed to infer that a dozen rich suitors would be found awaiting Meg in London, eager to fling themselves and their fortunes at her feet. Perhaps in her blind love for her daughter the widow believed this really would be the case.

The house found a tenant without any difficulty, and very soon Margaret and her mother began their packing. It did not take long, since only their mearest personal possessions would accompany them; everything else would be left for the use of the new occupant of Acacia Villa. Two large boxes would probably constitute the sole luggage of the Russells. Mrs. R. was in all the throes of packing when she suddenly bethought herself of an old desk of her husband's, which contained private papers, and must not be exposed to strangers' scrutiny.

She went in search of her daughter.

"Meg, where is that little writing-case of your father's? I can't find it anywhere?"

Meg, deep in the agony of compressing her dresses into a space far too small for their size was not communicative.

"I'm sure I don't know!"

"Then you must think. I can't leave it behind for those people to go prying into."

Margaret deposited the dresses in their cramped nest and had once more leisure to attend to her mother's request.

"I don't think I know what desk you mean, mamma."

"That little leather writing-case of your poor father's. I know we brought it here, but I have not seen it for ages."

"I gave it to May. I couldn't think what you meant at first."

"You gave it to May?"

"Yes!"

"You have just ruined us."

"Nonsense," said Margaret, practically.

"It was an old school desk of father's. I

daresay it cost a lot when he was young, but you could get as good a one now at any fancy shop for half-a-crown. It always made you cry to look at it, and May did want something of papa's so much, so I gave it her."

Mrs. Russell could have shaken her darling child with the greatest pleasure.

"You have just ruined us!"

"How?"

"There were papers in that desk—all sorts of papers."

"There couldn't be many. The desk itself was barely big enough to hold a little writing-paper and envelopes. I suppose May took it with her."

"Of course she did. Just think of it! We can't tell into whose hands it has fallen."

"She would never part with it!"

"She may be obliged to."

Margaret shuddered.

"I suppose I know what you mean, mamma, but I don't agree with you. I believe that even if she were so poor as to be wanting bread May would guard that desk as something too precious for sale. It was my father's, and she loved him."

"Better far than you did."

"I am not an affectionate disposition, mamma. It's no use looking for that desk, you must resign yourself to its loss."

"I hope some day you will not learn all the loss of it means," was the mother's answer, as she turned to go back to her own room.

A day or two later and Margaret went to London with Mrs. Russell. They left Mackstone without a pang. They were not the kind of women to cling to a place because one they loved was buried there. The chief object of both was that a wealthy marriage might give Margaret the luxuries she desired; to this end they had come to the great metropolis, and if they only attained it they would be quite willing never to see the grey stone of Mackstone church again, or the picturesque old graveyard where the husband and father lay sleeping his quiet rest.

They were to spend their first months in London in apartments. It was June, and the London season was at its height.

Mrs. Russell was a very clean woman, but she had not been a lady. She had married a man of old family, and caught a certain knowledge of society from him, but she was awfully ignorant of some points. She actually believed that because her daughter was handsome they would, in spite of their poverty and lack of friends, at once gain an entrance into the fashionable world.

With this end in view the widow commenced her search for apartments at the West-end, within easy reach of the parks and other fashionable resorts.

Alas! a very few inquiries convinced her that her whole income would have been insufficient to pay the exorbitant rents demanded in this favourite locality.

"We shall be ruined," she said to Margaret.

"Fancy, that woman asked five guineas a week for two rooms!"

"We must go to smaller houses and less well-known streets, I suppose. Mamma, do settle on something soon—I am tired to death."

But it was more easily said than done. They had to come down very much in their requirements before they obtained a shelter suited to their means.

The fashionables were beginning to turn into the park for their drives before Mrs. Russell and her daughter finally established themselves in the drawing-room of a neat house near Westbourne-grove.

They decided not to unpack till after tea. They were tired and longing for some refreshment.

Their landlady, a pleasant, respectably spoken woman, hurried her preparations, and soon spread a cosy meal, bringing with the teapot, as a kindly attention, the daily newspaper, thinking it would amuse the ladies.

Mrs. Russell leant back in the easy chair, and took up the paper mechanically, as her



daughter began to pour out the tea, but in a minute a faint cry escaped her; and Margaret, turning hastily round, saw that her face was of an ashen hue.

"Mamma, are you ill?" she cried, in alarm. "What is the matter?"

But Mrs. Russell caught her by the hand.

"Hush! do not speak so loud. Let me be quite quiet for a minute or two. I shall be better soon. Go on with your tea."

Reassured, Meg took a slice of bread-and-butter and tasted their landlady's excellent tea, but she still watched her mother anxiously. It was not like the astute, clever widow to change colour and then faint suddenly.

For full ten minutes neither spoke. Mrs. Russell sat with her face hidden in her thin hands. At last, to her daughter's unspeakable relief, she raised her head and looked eagerly at Margaret.

"My dear," she said, with a strange break in her voice, "should you like to be rich?"

Margaret began to fear her mother's brain was turning. She tried to shirk the question.

"It rests with yourself, Meg. It was no idle dream of our coming to London and taking these apartments. When Mrs. Bates brought up this paper she opened the road to wealth for us."

"Mother, are you dreaming?"

"Am I given to dreaming, Meg? Once more, I repeat, it rests with you to be a rich woman. Trust yourself to me, and I promise prosperity shall dawn for you."

"But I don't understand."

"You must ask no questions. You must submit to me in everything."

"And I shall be rich?"

"Richer than you have ever hoped for."

"And there is no risk?"

The mother hesitated.

"There is a certain risk, but it is slight. If failure came it would fall chiefly on me, Meg, the time has come. You will never have the chance again. Decide quickly. Will you be a rich woman?"

Margaret never hesitated. She could not understand her mother, but she had infinite confidence in her. She had yearned for wealth from her childhood. She possessed a great love of splendour, and had been ambitious from her cradle. She was just the kind of girl to sacrifice everything on earth for wealth. Only now she was not asked to sacrifice anything. She was merely bidden to choose between riches and poverty.

She stood beside her mother on that sweet June evening, and calmly and deliberately made her choice. With one hand on Mrs. Russell's shoulder, the other playing with her own dark hair, she said slowly,—

"It is all a mystery to me, mother, but I cannot hesitate. I choose wealth at any cost."

The mother shuddered just a little at those last words. Perhaps she would have preferred them left unsaid. Perhaps at that moment she regretted, for the first time, that Margaret had nothing of her dead father's unselfishness and tender thought for others. But she uttered no word of reproof. She only said gravely,—

"Then dress yourself at once—we are going out."

As in a dream Margaret made her toilet. When she came back her mother was standing in her bonnet and mantle, giving some last directions to Mrs. Bates, and a four-wheeled cab was before the door.

Margaret sprang into it. Her mother followed more slowly, pausing just to give instructions to the driver. Meg tried hard to hear them, but she only managed to catch one word—"Park-lane."

It was late now—almost eight o'clock. The world of fashion had gone home to dine or arrange itself for evening parties. Quite another caste of people thronged the streets. Meg watched them idly, but her thoughts were far away. She was trying hard to fathom the mystery of her mother's conduct.

"Look!" she cried, suddenly, as the cab

turned a corner. "Mamma, surely that was May."

Mrs. Russell started as if she had been stung.

"You must never speak that name again, Margaret. I am sacrificing a great deal—more, much more, than you can understand—for you. In return I demand but one thing—that name must never cross your lips. The girl who bore it must be for you as though she had never breathed."

Meg was awed by her mother's manner, but she had no time for expostulation. The cab had stopped before a stately mansion, and the widow was alighting.

## CHAPTER X.

MAY had promised Stuart St. John to return to her aunt; at least, if she had not promised it him in so many words, she had let him believe that such was her intention; but as the train rolled rapidly on, bearing her towards Mackstone, she thought of a meeting with Mrs. Russell, and Margaret became more and more painful to her, and she resolved it was beyond her power.

"It cannot matter to him," thought the poor child, "he will never see me again. I know he meant to be kind; but oh! he does not know—he can have no idea how cruel they would be to me."

She was no longer penniless when Stuart slipped her ticket in her hand; he had unsuspected by herself slipped something else, too—a tiny sovereign purse. Opening it she found five golden coins, and little as she cared for money a sigh of relief escaped her—those bright pieces meant to her escape from Acacia Villa. She would take a little lodging, never mind how poor or humble a one. Surely before all her benefactor's gift was gone she would have found employment!

"I shall owe it all to him," she thought, gratefully; "but oh! I wonder if he will see Bertram, and if he will be angry with him?"

She thought little of Sir Bertram's wrong against herself. She had escaped him, and the fact of his great love for her went far in her generous girlish heart to blot out the cruel wrong to which that love had tempted him. May's principal thought just now was that she was free.

All through her weary days and weeks at Acacia Villa she had longed for freedom, had pined for it as captives do. It was her intense longing for freedom which had made her accept Bertram's proposal and accompany him to London.

Alas! before she reached the great city she had learned one thing, that though she had left her aunt's tyranny behind she was not free.

The very touch of Bertram's lips, the close pressure of his arms around her, taught her that she had but exchanged her bondage; and it had dawned on the girlish heart that to be tied to a passionate man, whose love she did not return, might be captivity as dire in its way as that which had already been her portion.

Now she was free—no one would seek her or inquire after her. It was just as though May Russell was dead and buried and another girl had risen in her place, with new hopes and new aspirations, fresh make of her life what she could.

The next station was a large bustling junction, and here May alighted. She gave up her ticket to the collector, and with her little bag on her arm passed down the steps out into the road.

For a moment she stood dismayed; she had found herself in the middle of a large town; omnibuses and tramways were rushing up and down, passers-by hurried to and fro.

May stood and watched them till the tears came into her eyes.

Alas! alas! they all had business to fill their lives; each one of them had some aim and object, some plan in the great world, and she alone had none.

A gentleman more feeling than the rest saw the girl's sad, troubled face, and asked her if he could be of any use to her. Had she lost her way, or been separated from her friends?

"Bourton is very full to-day on account of the festival," he concluded, kindly.

The festival! May tried not to betray she had not understood him; then she thanked him, and said gently she was a stranger, and was seeking some apartments; perhaps he would tell her the way to some quiet part of the town.

He gave the direction carefully, but they fell on ears too weary to profit by them.

May turned to the right instead of to the left, and so she emerged not into the quiet suburban road her guide had spoken of, but into the grandest street of all Bourton, where stood the Town Hall, within the halls of which the festival had even then begun.

It was a strange sight; the carriages kept dashing up to the entrance, depositing crowds of gaily-dressed people, and then driving off. Three or four policemen were striving to keep order, but their efforts seemed hardly appreciated by the good folks of Bourton, who in their anxiety to see the utmost of the ladies' grand dresses, and the gentlemen's uniform, often laid themselves and their children into no small danger of being trampled under foot.

May stood still because the crowd was so dense; it would have been impossible to attempt to push her way through it. She was wondering a little what especial pleasure all those people could find in waiting there, when an agonised shriek fell on her ear.

A little child had strayed from its nurse's side. Seeing a familiar face on the opposite side of the road had started to run across, when a carriage and pair came rapidly up.

The nurse shrieked. The child, a mere baby, was utterly unconscious of its danger. In vain the spectators waved their hands. The little creature could not interpret their well-meant signal.

Another moment, and it must have been crushed to death; but May rushed forward, she could not stand still and see that bright, joyous little life quenched.

In an instant she had seized the child, and half-pushed, half-thrown it into the arms of the nearest bystanders.

The baby was safe; but it was too late to think of herself. She had no time to run, no time to retreat. The carriage passed on, and the girl whom no one waited for—whom in all this great world there was no vacant place—was lying white and still and cold, a motionless heap upon the ground.

(To be continued.)

WHAT CONSTITUTES HAPPINESS.—In what consists this much sought-for blessing? In nothing has opinion so wide a range. Demand an answer from any number of persons, and not two among them will return the same. Even your chosen companion and bosom friend will differ from you. And how the ideas as to what constitutes happiness change with succeeding years. The youth or maiden would scorn that which to the child appeared the very summit of enjoyment. A few more years, and sober middle-age looks backward with a calm pity to the maiden's love-dream, or the young man's eager and adventurous pursuits. And as years advance, so do tastes and inclinations vary; until, perhaps, life has stretched to that saddest period of all, when poor humanity returns to childhood's joys. Some who have studied this problem maintain that the most exquisite degree of happiness is attained only by the contrast of some past sorrow—for the landscape that has no shadows can never reveal the glorious brilliancy of sunshine. The rays of happiness, like those of light, are colourless when unbroken. Sometimes it is all gladness and sunshine, and Heaven itself lies not far off, and then it changes suddenly and clouds shut out the sky.

## THE FAIREST FOE.

## CHAPTER IX.

PARADISE HALL was crowded to the doors and beyond them when Keith Montrose entered and took a place quite at the back, where he could see but could not be seen from the platform.

He glanced over the audience, taking in with a practised eye the social status of the majority in the front row, mostly philanthropists, men and women doctors, and those interested in sanitary matters; further back those who had some need of being taught how to keep such health as bad dwellings, overcrowded rooms, and defective draining allowed them.

This was no silk and satin meeting, where touching appeals should be made, and harrowing descriptions given of weeping widows and fatherless children—where ladies in rich dresses should with tears, pull out portemonnaies and give their sovereigns for the poor, helpless creatures.

No such easy charity was asked of these people in the front row; there was something more difficult besought, for it is far harder to give one's work and time and ability to a good work than to put a ten-pound note down.

On the platform were many noted physicians—the cleverest in the land; there were also two or three well-known lady doctors, but Laurie did not yet arrive.

If Keith had meant to see his idol in the midst of everyday life he had chosen his meeting well, and it was a kind of satisfaction to him to bruise his own feelings, to face up boldly the unpalatable truth, that in such places and about such matters his Laurie was quite at home.

But it was pain; he was bruised, the people were frowny; there was a close smell, and the audience for the most part looked as if they sorely needed "sanitary" lectures, and Keith Montrose thought sanitary affairs of all others the most uninteresting. He took only that interest in such questions as they affect the broader question of the nation's life; but as to the details—as to the building of a room four square feet larger, or white-washing, or laying a drain-pipe, &c., those were for sanitary commissions and so on.

From his thoughts Keith was aroused by such a mingled clapping and cheering as made the building tremble. No need for him to look, there was Laurie Greenfell, his own darling, so quiet, so graceful, shaking hands with a famous physician who sat had seen rather cold to her and her sisterhood, but who now led her to her seat with deferential courtesy, and had warm words of praise to say of her in a well-known medical paper, praising not less her skill and her learning than the sweet womanliness that lent it value.

Could there be something radically unfit in a training and system that could leave a Laurie Greenfell what she was?

"Bless her sweet face!" said a woman, near Keith, wiping her eyes; "she sat up with my poor husband two nights, and she brought him through, that she did."

"And she's just a angel," said another, "a coming round the court so soft and gentle like. My man, you know," laughing, as she swung a not very clean baby up and down, thereby distributing a not savory air in the neighbourhood of the *West-End* editor, who did not in this minute so keenly observe the odour, "e didn't 'art like one of them 'ere lady doctors a oman"; but 'or', she made little Jim well, and did her best for the baby that's gone. 'Aint she just clever?" says 'e, now."

"Can't she speak up, too?" put in another. "'Or', you should a 'eard 'er hording that their inspector round, which ought to ha' white-washed, and 'adn't. Wist, she be a speakin'!"

She was. The silver, clear voice was scarcely lifted, but it came as distinctly as a perfectly-toned bell to Keith's ear, and it was nothing remarkable she spoke of—the most practical, the most matter-of-fact, the most uninteresting of subjects—yet she gave her own charm of word and manner to every sentence.

There are some people to whom one listens willingly, even if they speak only of the driest subjects; such is the magic of style they possess.

One of these was Dr. Laurence Greenfell; and, putting aside the fact that this was the woman he loved, Keith Montrose thought he could well be interested in the sanitary conditions of poor dwellings when the subject was so handled; and, somehow, she seemed not out of her element.

She was a woman, a lady delicately bred and highly cultivated—one of the world's polished ones; and she addressed a crowded meeting of labourers and artisans, and rougher, lower people than these. She spoke of drainage and overcrowding, of cleanliness and its antithesis; and all seemed suitable for her to speak of.

Keith felt no shock, at any rate, while under the influence of her potent charm. It did not seem dreadful for a woman to stand forth in public and speak like this. He told himself afterwards this was only feeling, not reason; and yet, surely all these long weeks some of his opinions had been a little lowered at their roots! The very wish, the very longing he had to bring himself to see the position as she did, made him over-sensitive to mistake what he wished for for what he thought. Since he had been with Laurie at Moulton-on-Sea he had seen more of the women who gave themselves up to the profession, he had mixed more with them, and some of what he knew to be prejudices had been disturbed and laid aside.

Keith Montrose was far too clear-sighted and too noble-minded to cling to an opinion merely because he had previously held it under different condition of thought.

Night after night came back the same arguments for and against. He thought Laurie, this beautiful, delicate woman, stepping so boldly, yet so modestly to the fore part of the great never-ending battle, with disease and want and sin, if going nobly through years of study that must often have revolted her woman's soul, in order to gain the knowledge wherewith she should arm herself.

And did she not bring to it a purer, holier soul than the men who studied the same subjects? The question of conflicting duties did not come seriously before him; he knew if he had married a singer or an actress perhaps a quarter of a year she would be away fulfilling engagements, and he knew many such with husband and children who managed to fulfil their duties both to family and profession, and gave more attention to the former than nine fashionable mothers out of ten, who have, or ought to have, all their time at their own disposal.

"Dr. Laurie Greenfell is looking fagged," some one said in society one evening later than this. "She ought to leave town—she has done wonders in all this dreadful cholera time—no man could have worked harder."

"Such women," answered the person addressed, "do much to eradicate the prejudice or opinions so firmly rooted in most men's minds against a woman being a doctor."

"Yes! if all were like her."

If all were like her. But Keith had only to do with the one, not with the "all."

It was quite true that Laurie was looking tired, not only looking, but feeling. For she had her own private burden to bear now, her own skeleton to hide, and that she bore her burden bravely, uncomplainingly, made it none less hard. It used to come over her sometimes in these days, when she returned home after being about all day in scenes of misery and wretchedness, how sweet it must be to have some one to meet who loved and thought

of you, who would clasp you gently in his arms, and give you that dear welcome home that her heart ached to receive.

But it was an empty house Laurie came to—a solitary table she sat down to. If she sought to soothe herself with music no one was pleased but herself. Things seemed to have lost their old savour—all but her work; and at times in those days Laurie was afraid to play—music brought the tears to her eyes, and she must not be weak.

When the worst of the cholera was passed Laurie left town. She was, indeed, tired and overworked, and yielded to her brother's entreaties that she should go with them down to Folkestone, where they were to stay for Edgar's holiday.

"Unless you will go abroad?" said Edgar, questioning.

But Laurie leaned her head on his shoulder wearily.

"No, I would like to be with you, Eddie," she said, softly, a little tremulously; and he looked at her anxiously, and kissed the silky curls on her forehead.

"You are overfagged, my Laurie?"

"Yes, a little, Eddie;" and then she lifted her head after a moment, and smiled brightly. "We will go all together, and forget all the work. Now I will go to Nell, and see about various things."

For she could scarcely trust her self-control just now, and feared to be too long with him; and so they all went together down to the seaside—down to delicious, breezy Folkestone; and Keith Montrose was off to Germany for a time. But he found no peace on the Rhine any more than he had in his office in Wellington-street; and the further he went from Laurie the more he longed for her presence. The colours were coming down fast.

## CHAPTER X.

"Come and see the boat in, Auntie Laurie, please!" cried a small edition of Edgar to that much-tyrannised over, much-loved, and petted, and ordered about Dr. Laurie.

Ellen used to say that Laurie atoned for much sternness to her patients by unlimited spoiling of Eddie. And so Laurie went down to the harbour with the boy, and his father and mother, to see the boat come in—that never-failing amusement at Folkestone and Dover.

"Here she comes!" cried Eddie, dancing delightedly up and down, keeping fast hold of Laurie's hand the while; "now she's coming alongside! Why, do you know that gentleman, auntie?"

For a gentleman standing on the deck had lifted his hat and bowed. Laurie drew a deep, silent breath, and for a moment her hand closed fast round that of the child. But she turned quietly to her brother, saying, with a smile,—

"There is Mr. Montrose, Eddie!"

And at that minute Keith sprang ashore, and was bowing low, with words of greeting, to Mrs. Greenfell. But Laurie knew not why, when he turned to her, his silent hand-clasp sent an almost wild thrill of something that was more than joy, hope, expectancy.

Keith only paused to give his servant some orders; then they all turned and together went with the stream back along the shore, question and answer passing between them.

"You have not taken a long holiday, Mr. Montrose?" said Ellen.

"Work calls me back, Mrs. Greenfell," he answered, smiling, "business; and I had some holiday in the summer you know."

"Yes," put in Eddie, who had attached himself to one of Keith's hands with the pretty trustfulness of a pretty petted child; "but that wasn't a holiday, Mr. Montrose!"

"No. Why not, Eddie?" said Keith, bending down a little, a half-smile on his handsome mouth.

"Why, you were ill!" answered Eddie. "You broke your arm, and Auntie Laurie made you well, didn't she? And do you

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know papa said it was a 'great lark,' because you didn't like ladies to be doctors?"

"Eddie, you must not chatter so," Laurie said, with a touch of severity, and she bent her head to hide the flush that rose to her cheek, but Keith glancing at her said to the child, gently,—

"Papa was right then, my child; but Auntie Laurie taught me many things then. You see I had made a mistake," then he immediately turned round to Edgar and said, smiling as he paused, "here, I stop at the Pavilion; you, I suppose, are on the cliff?"

"Yes, but you will come and dine with us, won't you?" said Edgar, cordially, and his wife added her entreaties, and so Keith promised.

But Laurie said nothing; she wished it too much, and yet dreaded it.

The Greenfells had rooms in a house facing the sea, so it took but little time for Keith to walk up from the Pavilion. He was early, and was informed that the ladies were not yet down, and was ushered into the drawing-room, from which opened a smaller room only divided by silken curtains from the principal apartment. Therein stood the piano, and someone was softly touching the keys, playing dreamy minor chords and wandering restlessly from one to the other, as if the heart of the player, too, were restless.

A moment Keith stood and listened; he was very pale now in this supreme moment of his life, and yet his heart was throbbing heavily. Only one second he paused, then stepped forward and lifted the curtains and stood within. He had made scarcely any sound, yet she had known he was there, and with a half-started look rose from the piano, the crimson rushing to her brow, trying to say some ordinary words of welcome. But he came to her side and her hands were clasped in his—held close, and he bowed his forehead down on them with half-whispered words.

"Laurie—Laurie—forgive—forgive! Oh! how could I make you suffer so, my darling—my darling?"

And forgiveness is so light when one loves. Laurie only bowed her bright head on his breast as he clasped her to him, and whispered, half bewildered with this new happiness,—

"Keith, is it all over? You will not leave me again?"

"My own Laurie! Ah, these months have been so long—so weary," Keith said, softly, passing his hands over the sunny curls. "I have come so tardily to see my mistake; mine is an unconditional surrender, my heart."

She laid her hand half-deprecatingly on his and flushed a little; but he smiled and kissed her tenderly.

"I know your thoughts, Laurie. No, it is not hard for me to surrender to you—to say to you that I could willingly efface all that I have said and written so hardly, so unjustly of—ah! Laurie." He bent his head and was silent. That was pain to remember how he had pained her.

"Dear Keith," said Laurie, gently, "forget it all, please, don't say any more; and you are quite—quite sure you shall, you will never be sorry."

"Never, my Laurie. I have not come lightly to think differently from what I used to, and I shall never interfere with your work or wish you otherwise than you are, unless you find it incompatible with other duties—and that I can safely leave to your own conscience. I love you the more, dear, that you could not give up your life's work for your heart's love."

"You are so good to me, Keith."

"Hush, Laurie, that wounds me," Montrose said, quickly; then almost immediately added, half smiling again, "Good, I don't know; you see the citadel would only surrender on its own terms; you wouldn't strike your colours, so I must."

"But where is my Laurie?" cried Edgar's voice in the drawing-room, and Montrose took

Laurie's hand in his and came through from the inner room.

"Here is Laurie," he said, laughing; "will you give her to me, to be my Laurie now?"

"Will I give her to you?" said Edgar, "it strikes me this young lady out in the world don't want to ask my leave. Ah! Montrose," he added, earnestly, with a change of tone as he clasped the other's hand cordially, "nothing could give me greater, more hearty pleasure than this. So Laurie is to be a good wife after all. Ah, Laurie! Laurie!" He drew his sister to him and kissed her.

"But a good physician too," Keith said, smiling, and went away, leaving the brother and sister together. And Nell was no less glad than her husband, but, of course, said triumphantly to him that night,—

"D'nd't I tell you there was something between those two?"

That was certainly a happy autumn vacation, and no one found Dr. Laurie Greenfell looking over-eggged and over-worked now.

The marriage, however, was not till the early spring, because neither could spare the time till about the Easter recess. Keith Montrose only laughs when even now sometimes a friend will chaff him on his past opinion, and when he comes home draws a certain beautiful face down on to his breast, and says, as he tells her,—

"But I struck my colours, after all, to the fairest foe—Justice—and to my first, last love—my wife."

[THE END]

#### AN ARAB HOUSEHOLD.

He was a grand-looking old man, and looked all the more so in his picturesque Arab costume. Following him through a small lobby, we ascended a dark and narrow wooden staircase. At the top of it we found ourselves in an arched gallery running round a small court. Here a few goats were wandering about, and from behind curtained doorways numerous dark faces were peeping at us.

The principal lady of the household received us at the door of the sitting-room, and soon we were surrounded by at least a dozen women and lots of children, not two of them dressed alike.

The poor children were all perfectly laden with bracelets, anklets and nose-rings, while a few had even nostril-rings. Indeed, many of them looked queer little objects, with patterns painted on their faces in scarlet, yellow, or white. Some of the women, too, had white spots painted around their ears. I thought these extremely ugly, for they strongly resembled rows of teeth.

One exceedingly smart baby was dressed in a yellow silk dress with a bright crimson border, and a little cap surmounted by a tuft of feathers of all the colours of the rainbow. His arms and legs were perfectly laden with jewels and his little neck smothered by rows and rows of beads, from which were suspended all sorts of charms and talismans.

Several of the women were afraid to shake hands, and one little fellow with an enormous nose-ring screamed most lustily. This led to our discovering that they were afraid of my dark hands, for I had on a pair of brown gloves. It was the first time that any of them had seen a pair of gloves; and the whole party were very much astonished, when I took them off, to find that my hands were white.

Miss Allen produced a scrapbook, and handed it first to the old gentleman. He commenced looking at it at the wrong end, as Arabs always do, and evidently enjoyed the pictures quite as much as the children.

Shortly after our arrival the servants brought in a gilt tray with two large green goblets full of sweet syrup; and we had to drink a little of this as well as three small cups of coffee, the old gentleman particularly wishing me to understand "that it was Arab custom to drink not less than three."

#### THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

—10:—

##### CHAPTER XLVI.

"IF YOU WANT ME—TELEGRAPH!"

The wedding-day was fixed for the 25th of January, at Rex Verreker's earnest entreaty.

The Marquis's warning acting on his own natural anxiety had made him feel that he would not know a moment's peace until Lady Valerie was made his wife by every tie by which a woman could be bound.

It was not that he had the smallest doubt of her fidelity and constancy, but that ever in the background stood the threatening image of Colonel Darrell, with his powers for evil unrestrained by scruples of conscience.

He felt like a man looking on whilst a child was playing on the borders of a forest where he knew a tiger was lurking.

If he turned his back, the beast might make a spring, and the child would be gone beyond the hope of recovery.

The Earl was amused at his fever of anxiety, which he ascribed to a lover's eagerness, and stood out firmly for the end of the month, maintaining that even by that time his lawyers would not be able to scramble through all the legal business connected with the settlements.

"I wish to Heaven there were no settlements," said Rex, unreasonably; "people will take me for a fortune-hunter."

"Don't talk like a romantic schoolboy. I know that it is Valerie herself you want, and you would like her just the same if she hadn't a penny," answered the Earl with a sigh, as he thought of his own lovely wife, whom he had fought so hard to win, only to lose her after a few years of happiness. "But the money will be very useful to you in the diplomatic service, where you have to make some show on very little pay; and remember, Valerie expects to be an ambassadress before she dies!"

Verreker smiled as he imagined her standing in the reception-room of some Embassy, with diamonds glittering in her dark hair, soft folds of white lace draping her graceful figure, and her beauty shining forth like a star. Would the dream ever be realised? Everything seemed possible now.

Miss Beck was enchanted at the news of the engagement, and would have bustled back before her holiday was over to clasp her darling in her arms, if her only sister with whom she was staying had not been taken dangerously ill. She indemnified herself for her enforced absence by writing affectionate notes every day, full of hints for the trousseau, in which she was afraid that her dear Valerie would not take sufficient interest.

But in this she was quite mistaken, for Valerie was anxious to look her best in her lover's eyes, and threw herself into the preparations with all the eagerness of her impulsive nature.

She went up to town with the Duchess of Agincourt, and spent a few weeks in Belgrave-square, where her time was principally taken up by milliners, dressmakers, bootmakers, &c.

Marie de Ruigny went with her at the Duchess's express invitation, and the two girls made a great sensation wherever they appeared in public.

Of course Rex Verreker was always in attendance, and the Marquis of Daintree, who was to be best man on the all-important occasion, seemed to think it necessary never to let the future bridegroom out of his sight. Wherever Lady Valerie and the Countess went, Rex followed, and the Marquis was always at his side or his heels. If he was inclined to cry over spilt milk, he kept up a wonderfully cheerful appearance, and his low spirits were hidden so successfully that the Duchess remarked that he and the pretty Austrian had always some joke between them, which might end in something serious for the Marchioness.

"Do you think so?" and Valerie looked

rather startled, as she remembered a scene in her own boudoir, not so very long ago.

"Oh, I should be so very glad," she added, warmly; "he deserves to be happy if any man does!"

She thought of his kindness to herself, the delicate way in which he had tried to help her without intruding on her confidence—his goodness to Rex at Vienna, for which she could never thank him enough.

Now she came to think of it, those two, the Marquis and Marie, were always together, at Beaudesert or in London—place or time made no difference. They were always glad to meet, never willing to separate, and conversation between them never flagged.

How engrossed she must have been with her own concerns not to have noticed it before! She felt half-ashamed of her own selfishness.

Lord Marshall called in Belgrave-square, and brought an exquisite bracelet of pearls and emeralds.

He sat on his chair looking so glum, that the Duchess thought something must be the matter, and asked if his wife were ill.

"Oh, dear no! quite well, thank you," he answered, moodily, almost as if the lady in question were too well to please him.

"We were so sorry not to see you at Christmas," said Valerie, with her charming smile.

"I don't think you can have missed me much. I wanted to come, but I couldn't manage it. Lady Valerie," lowering his voice, "if I can be of any use to you at any time, telegraph to Park-street."

"You are very good!" thinking to herself that she wanted no extraneous help from anyone now that she had Rex to protect her. "Don't forget that you've promised to stay with us towards the end of the month," with a slight blush.

He got up, shook hands with the rest, and stood before her, looking at her very earnestly.

"Good-bye, Lady Valerie; Verreker's a lucky fellow; but don't forget!"

Then he nearly crushed her fingers, and hurriedly left the room.

Outside on the pavement, he pulled his hat down over his eyes, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Bruin was always chafing me, but I didn't know I should ever feel as bad as this. Well, after all, who could have helped it? She's one in a thousand, and there's no one like her!"

Then he pulled himself together, and walked on at a brisk pace, telling himself that he was as sentimental as a schoolgirl.

"I wonder what Lady Marshall said to such a gorgeous affair as this?" observed Rex, taking up the bracelet, and making the jewels flash in the firelight.

"Perhaps she did not see it," said Valerie, demurely.

"Would you like me to be giving bracelets to a lady without your knowledge?" looking down at her with a smile in his eyes.

"You had better not, if you want to know what peace is! But, do you know, he doesn't think you are capable of taking care of me, for he told me to telegraph to him in Park-street, if he could be of use to me!"

"What number?" writing the address in his pocket-book.

"Sixteen. But, Rex, as if I could want anyone but you!"

"I might tumble into a ditch, and it would be convenient to have Marshall to help me out!" purposely ignoring the fact that the offer of help had been made to her, and not to himself, for fear lest her thoughts might revert to Darrell.

"You might be frozen to death if you waited till he answered your telegram; besides, I don't see how you could send one from the bottom of a ditch!" she answered, laughingly.

"A groom might do that, or you, if you happened to be looking on. But, seriously, are you really going home to-morrow?"

"Yes, I want to be as much with papa as possible. I can't bear to think of him all alone. I wish he would keep dear old Becky!"

"Wouldn't be proper; they might make a

match of it; and, besides, the dear creature finds she will have to stay with her sister."

"Yes, I know. Oh, Rex! how many changes there are, it almost frightens me!"

"It will be a new life for both of us, dearest, but I think you won't be unhappy."

"Unhappy! No! With you I shall feel so safe, I shall never be frightened again. I wish you would come with us to-morrow."

"I will, if you wish it; but I shall have to come back again."

Then she remonstrated, and said it was downright selfishness on her part to put him to so much trouble and expense.

The latter she had never thought of till lately, when she had been obliged to remember that her lover was not so rich as herself.

He had given her a thick gold band, with a diamond in the centre, as an engagement ring, and apologised for its not being of diamonds alone, as if the jewels could have given it any further value in her eyes.

She was glad that he was poor that she might bring him something besides herself; whilst he was sorry that she was rich, because he thought it a husband's part to give rather than to receive.

The Marquis of Daintree found it necessary to return to Felton on the same day as the others went back to Beaudesert, so they travelled down together, and a cheerful quartet they made.

The Duchess asked where was the chaperon, but she was immediately silenced by an allusion to her own past, when she seemed to consider such a person as an unnecessary appendage.

"Well, my dear, if I had indulged in one I should never have married the Duke, for everyone knew that he was fast, and had lost his last rag of character in a previous season. And see what a model couple we make! He goes his way, and I go mine. We never meet except when we have a dinner-party at home, and then it is quite refreshing to see his cheerful face at the bottom of the table. There is nothing like novelty for making anything agreeable."

They all laughed at her frankness, but none of them wished to follow her example. Her position might be splendid as regarded the world of fashion, but surely there was a void somewhere in the region of the heart, which riches could not fill!

Valerie thought so, as she looked at Rex waiting to escort her to the carriage. Would he or she be content with a married life in which they would never meet, except now and then at the dinner-table?

The Earl was delighted to see his daughter looking so well, and congratulated himself on having acted against the advice of most of his neighbours in accepting Verreker for his son-in-law. Even without his own strong affection for the young man, it was enough to have Valerie looking her own sweet self, as if no cloud had ever dimmed her brightness.

When two people are perfectly inseparable it is hard to part even for a few days. Rex knew that he must go, for there were various important affairs to be settled, which had all been put aside as long as Lady Valerie was in town, so he left the next day by the latest train, preferring to travel half the night rather than miss a few hours of her company.

He went away, telling her that she was quite safe from all annoyance, as the shutters were up at Ivora Keep, and its master away from home; and she told him that she was never going to be frightened again, for Colonel Darrell had evidently given her up by this time.

Rex remembered the flowers on Christmas-day, and still had doubts; but the Marquis was within call, and Marie de Buigny had promised to telegraph if anything happened, not only to the St. James's Club, but also to 16, Park-street.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### REMITTED!

"WELL, Miss Springgold, you are agreed that to help me won't be quite the same as helping the Evil One himself?"

The speaker was Colonel Darrell, and he was sitting in Flossie's pretty little sitting-room, the firelight playing on the sombre beauty of his face, his head resting against the back of a chair which had once been, in the days that were gone, a special favourite of Rex Verreker's. His attitude betokened that he had grown to find himself completely at his ease in Miss Springgold's boudoir, and the smile that hovered round his lips showed that he was tolerably satisfied with his progress.

"You have, so far, persuaded me against my own convictions," she said, slowly, feeling as if she were drawn on against her will, and had not the strength to resist.

"That is a man's province. A woman hesitates because she thinks it gives her an extra charm."

"I thought it was my conscience, and not vanity, that stood in your way."

"What is conscience? A walking-stick for children, a crutch for old age. A girl in the bloom of youth needs neither."

"How wickedly you talk! I believe it would be better for me if you had never come," her bosom heaving with suppressed agitation.

He looked at her with a calm smile, as if he were gauging his power. She was quite pretty enough for Verreker. What a fool the fellow was to throw her over! Then he said aloud,—

"Why better? Is silent admiration bad for a woman's nerves?"

"It's not that; only I have known Valerie all my life, and I should not like to do her any real harm."

"You don't love her?"

"No; at times I've hated her," a gleam darting from her light eyes.

"But I love her," his voice softening; "and I would rather kill myself than do her an injury. Do you doubt it?"

"I don't know. Her idea of an injury might be different to yours."

"An injury is generally a fact, not only an idea, and I can't imagine why any woman should think it an injury to be married to Louis Darrell," drawing himself up in a manner that became him wonderfully.

Even Flossie's heart swerved for a moment from its allegiance to Verreker, as she looked at his rival with involuntary admiration in her eyes.

"There is nothing against my birth, for we have a habit of thinking that the old name of Darrell is as good as most titles; my fortune is large enough even to satisfy the wishes of the extravagant, and I am not deformed so as to be personally repulsive."

"No, you are not deformed," with an amused smile on her cherry lips; "but you have made a most important omission. If I were engaging a servant I should ask for a character."

"But characters are all humbug. The best are generally forgeries, and no one believes in them. Besides, a wife has no business to concern herself about what has gone before; the past is mine, and I couldn't share it with her if I would; the present is hers, as well as the future, and I won't share either with any one else."

"You talk as if she were already won!"

"And so she is, if you are true to your promise. Miss Springgold, listen! There is nothing on earth I won't be ready to do for you if you are true to me now."

He leant forward, and fixed his glowing eyes on her face.

She writhed as if struggling against the spell of a serpent.

"You are certain that you could make her love you?" she asked, doubtfully.

"She must love me now, or I should have no power over her."

He knew that this was not true; but he



thought it the most convincing argument that he could find. In this he was not mistaken, for Flossie was glad to catch at the merest straw to save her conscience.

"True! They say you fascinated her on the night of the ball; they say she receives letters from you constantly; in fact, she went on in such a way that the paragraph in *Venue* nearly cost her her character!"

All this was news to him; but he listened eagerly. So their names had been linked together by scandalous tongues, and he was probably the only man in the county who had not heard of it.

"But, Miss Springgold, who told you of these stolen meetings? I thought they were a private matter between Lady Valerie and myself; I would have died rather than mention them."

"Then the scandal was true?" a light coming into her eyes.

If Valerie had really kept these assignations she was not worthy of Rex Verreker.

Colonel Darrell was silent; he had not lost all the instincts of a gentleman, and nothing was further from his thoughts than a wish to brag of the advantage he had obtained over an innocent girl, especially when that girl was about to become his wife.

"The scandal was true?" repeated Flossie, her eyes fixed on his face.

"No," he answered, drawing a deep breath, feeling that he must clear her from all stain, or else hate himself for ever. "Lady Valerie is pure as that white blossom," looking across at a carnation in a small glass vase. "If ever we met in private, to her it was by chance—though not to me."

"Of course you would say so," with a sarcastic smile; "but you cannot explain away the letters that passed between you."

He frowned, unable to help despising her and himself as well, for having to make use of her.

"Are you responsible for all the letters that come to you?"

"Yes, if I answer them."

"But she never did," cried Flossie, looking at him. "Oh, Colonel Darrell, you expect me to believe that?" with a light laugh.

"Certainly, Miss Springgold, I expect you to believe everything I tell you," looking proud and defiant. "Valerie de Montfort has never stepped down from her pedestal, or she would have been mine before this. Do you think I could have kept away from her, if she had given me any encouragement?"

"I wonder what makes you so mad about her?" looking up at him, in much the same way as she used to look at Verreker.

"Remember I did not know you till your name was coupled with Rex Verreker's. When you are married to him, I don't intend our friendship to drop."

"I never shall be!" her cheeks turning pale, her head drooping.

"Yes, you will. He will feel desolate and disappointed, and it will be your task to comfort him. He has been caught by a certain glamour which hangs about the heiress of Beaudesert, but he will turn to you, as the sunflower to the sun, and, upon my word, I shall envy him!"

He stood up; but she retained her seat, the blood coursing wildly through her veins and every pulse beating. Would Rex ever come back with the love-light in his eyes, the love-words on his lips? Oh! if he did, she would never harbour another evil thought in her breast.

To have him always with her as he had asked, and she would cast aside all falsehoods and deceptions, and try to live up to the same standard as he did himself.

But the Colonel was waiting to say good-bye, and as he held the little feverish hand in his, a smile played about his lips. He knew that for the sake of her day-dream she would not fail him now. He saw it in her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks.

"You have not forgotten?—I am to send you a note which will absolve you from all blame when the time comes. You drive in your own

carriage to Beaudesert, another meets you at the corner of Fir-tree Lane, then you drive back alone, and your responsibility ceases. Are you sure you won't forget?" his dark eyes fixed upon hers as if he would read her very soul.

"No, I won't forget."

The flush had died out of her cheeks, and her lips were pale. He had drawn her on till she thought it was too late to draw back, but even now she felt she was paying a heavy price for a possible benefit.

"Then there is nothing more to be said," releasing her hand, and taking up his hat.

"You don't know what a comfort it is to me to have to deal with a woman of superior intelligence, who is above the weakness of making her conscience into a scourgew. Good-bye, most charming of confederates!" and, with a low bow, he went out of the room.

She stood upon the hearthrug, her hands clasped tight against her temples,—a light, graceful figure, her fair complexion and yellow hair giving her the appearance of something too pure and innocent to dream of working any evil.

And yet to what had she pledged herself? Her breath almost stopped as she thought of it, and the fictions with which Colonel Darrell saved her conscience seemed to melt in to thin air as soon as he was gone.

Valerie loved him! It was absurd. Had she not seen absolute adoration in her eyes when she looked at Rex? But she had stolen him from her. He was her rightful property—even the Marquis—dum-dee-headed, thundering old Brain—knew this. He had seen him always ready to give her the lead when they rode to hounds, always her partner for as many dances as she would allow him—always riding over to Scarsdale for a chat, when the weather was so vile that it kept everyone else away.

Valerie had injured her, and therefore it was only right and just that she should be punished. Besides, there were many women in the world who would have been only too glad to be punished by marrying the fascinating Colonel Darrell. Even the Duchess of Agincourt, who was so very particular, had thought him good enough to flirt with at the hunt-ball, and some girl in London was said to be dying of love for him.

She tried to reason herself out of the secret terror that possessed her; but say what she would she knew, in her heart of hearts, that there was something in Louis Darrell which would make her shrink in horror from the idea of marrying him. He might be fascinating as an acquaintance to be met every now and then in a ball-room, but as a husband!—the mere thought turned her cold, and this was the fate she was preparing for Valerie de Montfort!

"Oh! Rex, Rex, Rex!" she cried, passionately, as she threw herself face downwards on the sofa; "I am ruining my soul for your sake, and it is you who are bringing me to perdition!"

"I have settled Miss Springgold—drawn her on by the only bait which tempts her," said Colonel Darrell to himself, as he rode through the gathering darkness on his homeward way, though not to Ivora Keep. "Rex Verreker won't have a word to say to her, but her vanity is so immense that it would make her believe anything. And now for Sleeman—the rascal has been sulky of late, but the world would come to an end before he turned against me."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### A STRATAGEM.

"ONLY this day week, and I shall have another name, and begin another life. How wonderful it seems!" And Lady Valerie de Montfort lent her lovely face against the window-pane, watching three or four horses being led up and down the gravel sweep, and thinking dreamily of the future which lay before her.

Marie de Ruvigny came into the room, holding up her habit, and trying to button her glove at the same time.

"Milor, will be dreadfully disappointed at your not coming. I don't believe he would have had the meet at Belton if he had known you wouldn't be there."

"He will be quite content with you," turning round with a smile. "Besides, I know he will understand; it wouldn't be nice to be pointed out as the girl who is going to be married next week."

"I don't know that there is anything improper in being married; but, if you feel shy, I wish you would let me stay with you."

"Not for the world. Lord Daintree would break his heart."

"Ready?" said the Earl, putting his head in at the door. "Good-bye, Val, take care of yourself, and don't stir from the house. We shan't be very late if we find a fox in Belton covert, and have good luck."

She ran after him to give him a kiss, and then went back to the window to see them both mount. The Earl looked a model of an English gentleman, with his firm seat, broad shoulders, and resolute features; and the Countess was very bewitching in her own style, as she kissed her hand to her friend.

The two rode away on their thoroughbreds, followed by a groom, another having been sent on in front with a second horse for the Earl in case he might want it. And Valerie turned away, resolved to devote this solitary morning to clearing off some of her correspondence.

First she would write to dear old Becky, whom she had neglected shockingly of late, and confide with her on the illness of her sister. Happiness had made her largely forgetful of her friends, and the present which she had bought as a parting gift for her governess and faithful friend was lying upstairs on a shelf of her wardrobe. It was a sealskin bag and muff in one, very richly mounted in silver, and Lady Valerie hoped that it would not only help to warm the old maid's fingers, but also save her from losing her purse, as she often did. If she forgot the muff, she must remember the bag; if she forgot the bag, chilly fingers would remind her of the muff.

It was quite a long letter by the time she had finished it, and it ended up with an entreaty that Miss Beek should tear herself away from her sister, if only for a day, to come for the wedding. If the sister were too ill to be left alone, Lady Valerie would most gladly pay a nurse, because she felt as if she could not be properly married without her old friend to see that nothing was forgotten. Lord Daintree was to be best man, and as he was in love with the Countess de Ruvigny, he would probably present her with the wedding-ring in a fit of absence, if Becky weren't there to keep a sharp look-out.

There was a smile on her lips when she closed the letter, for she guessed that the poor old maid would be delighted at her affectionate expressions, knowing very well that her former pupil never said more than she felt.

She was just going to begin a note to another old friend when there was a tap at the door, and to her surprise Miss Springgold walked in, not in her habit, as usual, when the hounds were out, but in ordinary walking attire—a hat with a plume of red feathers, and a long, tight-fitting velvet Newmarket, edged with fur.

"How d'ye do?" said Lady Valerie, putting down her pen, and rising from her seat, with an inward sense of annoyance, which she was careful to hide. "How is it that you are not hunting to-day?"

"I had a headache, and meant to stay at home," speaking hurriedly, with a certain catch in her breath, as if the words did not come quite readily; "and then I changed my mind, and thought I would drive to Winter-ton—"

"And then you changed your mind again and—"

"No, no; nothing of the sort!" her manner



["I'LL BE BRAVE," IN A HARSH VOICE; "ONLY TELL ME, IS HE VERY BAD?"]

altering suddenly. "Something has happened, but don't be frightened."

"My father!" gasped Valerie, taking hold of the back of a chair as if to support herself.

Miss Springgold looked down at the carpet, as if the agony in the girl's terrified eyes were almost too much for her.

"He has had a fall, and I've come to fetch you. Be brave, or I can't take you."

"I'll be brave," in a harsh voice, quite unlike her own; "only tell me is he very bad?" Her hand was already on the handle of the door.

"There is hope; but I was sent to fetch you." "I'm ready," trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

"Put on your hat and something warm, or I shall have your death to answer for."

Valerie disappeared, and Flossie turned to the fire. Her own face was white with suppressed agitation, but her lips were set resolutely. Having begun she meant to carry it through to the end. When Valerie came back, her maid, Susan, was with her, and offered to go, but Flossie hastily refused.

"Come, there's no time to lose," she said, hurriedly, and ran on in front down the corridor to avoid being questioned.

"Drive as fast as you can," to the coachman, as soon as they reached the brougham, who had evidently been given his orders beforehand.

Beaumont was out, the butler was a new man, who did not like to offer a suggestion, the footman seemed paralysed by the news of the calamity. Susan was the only one who had her wits about her.

She thrust her young mistress's belongings through the window, and asked if the doctor shouldn't be sent for.

"Yes," said Valerie, hoarsely, "send him after us!"

"But where?—where?"

The window was pulled up hastily by Miss Springgold, and the Colonel's bay mare dashed down the drive, as if life and death really depended on his speed.

"I wonder—I wonder—" said Susan, vaguely, looking after the retreating carriage, with a strange misgiving in her heart.

"The grooms are all out; but one of the helpers can go after the doctor. Did Miss Springgold say where the accident happened?" asked the butler.

"She said nothing, and my poor dear lady was so upset, she hadn't time to tell me anything at all. But I suppose you asked the coachman?" turning to him eagerly.

"Couldn't get anything out of him. He said it was a terrible fall, from what he could gather, and his mistress seemed in such a way about it, that he thought it was a case of 'kingdom come;' but as to the circumstances, he seemed as ignorant as I am myself."

"Oh! dear, dear!" and Susan began to cry. "Now don't give way; we've got to keep our heads clear, or we shall catch it. If it's anything serious they'll be wanting a bedroom on the ground floor. We must have a fire in the blue room, and see that hot water, brandy, and everything they are likely to ask for is ready to hand," said the butler, thoughtfully.

"Oh! if I could only ride, I'd ride off Belton way, and see if I could catch sight of anyone who's been out with the hounds."

"Not a bad idea. Of course, anyone out hunting would be bound to know. I'll go to the stables at once," and he turned away.

Meanwhile, Colonel Springgold's carriage was going at a swinging pace, as soon as it reached the level high-road; hedges, leafless trees, white gate-posts, seemed to fly past, but still the pace was not fast enough to satisfy Valerie's feverish impatience.

She sat bolt upright, her lips tightly pressed together like her hands, her eyes fixed on the world outside the window.

She did not ask a single question; her mind was totally engrossed by the fact that her father was ill, perhaps dying, and she might not even be in time to receive his last kiss.

Details seemed of no importance—no matter

how the fall had happened, the result was the only thing of consequence.

If he died, she would not care to know if it were from too reckless riding, or from a fault on the part of his horse—the beautiful roan which he always said carried him better than any other. If he got well, she would never let him hunt again—oh, never—or, if he did, she would always go with him—always!—when she was going to be married in seven days!

Flossie sat by her side in perfect silence. She had played her part, and found it detestably hard, but she would not add to it by any hypocrisies.

Colonel Darrell was responsible for everything, and if there were any wickedness in the matter, the guilt was his, not hers.

She had a note in her pocket which was to absolve her from all blame when the trick was found out; she was to appear as the tool, and not the accomplice.

The carriage suddenly came to a standstill at the corner of a lane.

Valerie looked at her with a question in her eyes, but her tongue seemed dumb.

Flossie bent forward and kissed her.

"I must say good-bye. The mare can go no further, but they have sent a carriage for you. You know I told you they had taken him to an inn; and you won't mind going alone. Of course the others will be there."

All the while she was picking her way through the mud to the spot where another brougham was standing, with a pair of black horses, close to a clump of firs.

There was a man on the box besides the driver, but he did not get down, or even turn round, when Lady Valerie sprang in. The coachman, however, evidently knew that speed was necessary, for no sooner had Miss Springgold shut the door upon her friend, than the carriage started off, as if the horses had suddenly taken fright, and Lady Valerie sat with white cheeks and eyes wide open with terror, thankful at least for the speed which was taking her—to Colonel Darrell's arms!

(To be continued.)





["FATHER," SHE MOANED, "OH! MY DEAR. COME AWAY FROM THIS DREADFUL WATER."]

NOVELLETTE.]

## A PERFECT WOMAN.

### CHAPTER I.

"So Stuart Ainslie is home again, father?" said Miss Fossanet, as she passed a cup of coffee to her parent; "and the village was quite gay all yesterday; it's a pity we were absent. Ella was quite full of news last night, and she tells me this morning that Stuart Ainslie's friend has rented Milden House of Mr. Ainslie."

"Quite true," responded Mr. Fossanet, lazily stirring his coffee; "and I should say things will be better for the people in general now. You see, Ainslie has lived in a state of seclusion since his son went away. Nice fellow enough Stuart was, but wild, you know; but he has had ample time to sow his oats. He has been away five years, and must now be nearly thirty; he ought to marry."

"That sounds arbitrary," lifting eyes of so dark a purple that most folks called them black, and smiling a little dreamily across the table at her father. "I've only an indistinct recollection of Stuart. He is tall, well-knit, and fair, I believe—am I right?"

"You are not very wide of the mark; he is, or was, very handsome, quite an Adonis, and it was said no woman could resist his charms."

Miss Fossanet smiled incredulously, then said in her low, rich voice,—

"I hate handsome men, they are always so insufferably conceited."

"You are very pronounced in your likes and dislikes; our friend the countess would say it was not good form to be decided on any point."

"Our friend, the countess," mimicking his tone; "is as Mark Twain would say, 'the last possibility in the way of an ass.'" She yawned as she spoke, and stretched out her arms so that the loose sleeves fell away to the elbows,

showing thus the fine turn of wrist, the perfect symmetry of an arm a sculptor would have craved as a model. "I am curious as to the friend; is he Boswell to Stuart's Johnson—an amiable nonentity or a gushing idiot? How I wish you could give the desired information!"

"Curious, Pauline?" laughing. "I thought you above such a failing."

"I don't wish to be exempt from any feature distinguishing my sex—another cup of coffee, father? No! well, what is the stranger's name? Surely you can tell me that."

"Denzil Ardoyne; he is first cousin to the Earl of Heddington, and heir presumptive—that is all I know!"

"It is a pretty name, rather, but sounds cynical. The possessor of it should be dark, sallow, with critical brown eyes and a general, air of contempt permeating his whole being. Did you ever like or dislike a person merely because his or her name did not please you?"

"No; such odd fancies belong chiefly to women, I believe," taking up his paper; and Pauline, seeing he did not wish to prolong the conversation, rose and sauntered from the room out upon the lawn.

She was a really handsome girl of twenty; tall, and of splendid physique, her throat rose from her shapely shoulders like a column, and her face was upborne, "flower-like," upon it; through the clear, light, olive skin shone the bloom of health and youth; her eyes, dark as night, purple as pansies, were now soft, now passionate, and now blazing with scorn; and about the proud, queenly head waved masses of dusky hair, drawn at last in heavy coils low upon the neck. The whole bearing of the girl was characteristic of pride, resolution, nobility; the brow and chin were proud, almost haughty, but the mouth was full and tender as a child's.

Mr. Fossanet looked up from his paper and watched her through the open window, with eyes in which pride and love struggled for mastery.

Beautiful! yes, as a poet's dream, moving with slow grace amongst her flowers, the straight, soft folds of her white morning dress falling round and clinging to her; no touch of colour save at throat and waist, where burned crimson carnations, fit types of the woman who wore them. Presently she turned and re-entered the house.

"Father, are you going out now? If we wait longer the morning will be too hot for walking?"

He laid down his paper. "Certainly my dear. Are you going to dress? I shall be ready to start in ten minutes; don't keep me waiting."

Miss Fossanet nodded, smiled, and went out, and up to her own room, where she was attended by a pleasant-looking girl apparently of her own age, named Ella Marshall, lady's-maid and foster-sister in one.

"You'll just be in time to see the decorations, Miss Pauline," she said, "they don't come down until eleven. I wish you'd been here yesterday; it was quite a case of killing the fatted calf. Mr. Ainslie was just mad to get his son back."

"And what is Mr. Stuart like now, Ella?" with lazy curiosity.

"Very handsome, miss; bronzed, of course, with blue eyes and a tawny moustache. I heard some say they thought his friend the handsomest of the two, but I didn't."

"What is he like? You see I have grown quite curious," with a slow smile.

"Thin rather, tall and very dark and pale, and he looks as if he is always tired, like one of the men they call 'maahers' up in London."

"Truly flattering!" laughing lowly; "but, seriously, I hope he is nice as he is to be a near neighbour."

"Mrs. Mason is going to keep his house, I hear."

"Poor man, I am sorry for him; I don't as a rule believe in lady-housekeepers, and most

certainly not in Mrs. Mason," and taking up her gloves she went down to her father.

They had a long, quiet walk through the meadows, and returning by a tortuous lane came face to face with two young men, one of whom lifted his hat, and advancing with a smile held out a large strong hand to Mr. Fossanet, and having greeted him cordially turned to Pauline.

"I can hardly hope you remember me, you were so very young when I left Tavilla, Miss Fossanet."

"Pardon, I have not forgotten you in the least," smiling and shaking hands, and Stuart Ainslie suddenly remembering his friend said—

"This is my boon companion, Mr. Ardoyne. Miss Fossanet, Mr. Ardoyne."

Both bowed gravely, and soon the girl found herself walking with the stranger, Stuart and her father leading the way. She looked a little curiously at him, but asked, in an ordinary tone, if he thought he should like Tavilla.

"I suppose I shall, as much as most places," with the faintest suspicion of a cynical drawl, and allowing his fine but languid brown eyes to rest on her perfect face for a moment. "I don't go into raptures over any place now—grows out of it, you see—and its insignificance."

A half disdainful light gleamed in her purple eyes. "Ah!" she said, with her slow smile, "you have exhausted all pleasures, and now, like Solomon, declare all things to be vanity. A healthy frame of mind certainly, and pleasant for your daily companions."

"Really, I had not considered them in the least. I live for self—and allow me to assure you it is a comfortable course to pursue."

"And so elevating!" with a scornful inflection in her voice; "are your fellow-creatures nothing to you?"

"Only so far as they serve my turn and render existence more tolerable."

"And Mr. Ainslie?—is your friendship for him only a name?"

"Is any friendship more than that? I don't pretend to higher thoughts, higher feelings than my neighbours."

"You are quite a curious specimen of mankind," quietly; "nothing but ultra-civilisation could produce such a specimen. I'm proud to know you."

Her dark eyes slowly sought his face again, and as he saw the look in them he smiled wearily and lifted his brows in a bored way, as if he found talking hard work on a hot summer morning.

"I've disgusted you, Miss Fossanet; I always disgust strangers—my misfortune, not my fault; but you'll soon get used to my little peculiarities. We all have them more or less developed, only some of us take care to hide them."

Here Stuart turned. "I'd forgotten, Ardoyne, we were to meet the governor at Piper's Farm. You will excuse us, Miss Fossanet. I could have wished our walk longer," and he looked with frank admiration into the proud, beautiful face, and purple eyes. "May I call to-morrow? I've got a perfect budget of news for you, scraps of continental gossip, descriptions (such as they are) of continental scenery, details of African and American life, perhaps not worth listening to—"

"That's enough, Ainslie," Mr. Fossanet broke in with a laugh, "lunch with us to-morrow, and bring Mr. Ardoyne with you."

So good-byes were said, and the two couples went in opposite directions.

"Well!" said Mr. Fossanet, "what is your opinion of our new friends?"

"I like Stuart, but his friend is insufferable; imitates in a poor modern way the cynicism of a Diogenes or Timon. He ought to be suppressed."

Scarcely were father and daughter out of ear-shot when Stuart Ainslie said—

"She is magnificent; what is your opinion, Denzil?"

"I have seen plainer women," taking out

his cigar case and selecting a fine Havanna, regarding it with the air of a connoisseur.

"What a cold wretch you are, I believe Helen herself would have failed to move you."

"Probably; her loves were too numerous for my taste. If ever I committed such an act of folly as marriage I should first be sure my bride-elect had had no lover before me; but I'm the last person in the world to contemplate such a step."

"Upon my word I believe you're right, though how you can withstand such a glorious creature as Pauline Fossanet is beyond my ken. Why, man, she has the most perfect face I ever saw, the loveliest voice I ever heard, and as for her figure, it's superb. She is a second Cleopatra."

"Handily complimentary to the lady in question—Cleopatra's respectability is open to doubt," knocking the ashes off his cigar.

"Confound you!" Stuart laughed. "I was referring to her personal appearance, not her moral or mental tendencies. I wish for once, Denzil, you would drop that air of boredom and cynicism; it may interest romantic girls but it maddens me occasionally. Did you ever care for any one woman in particular?"

Denzil Ardoyne removed his cigar from his lips, and looked at his friend with pitying surprise. "Never was such a fool, my boy; to be in love is to fret and fume and torture oneself for nothing; to live solely to minister to the caprices of a wayward woman; to be miserable if she frowns, to be insanely happy if she smiles—no, I was never in love."

"Then you've missed the greatest zest in life, the supreme happiness; why, I frankly confess I have been in love scores of times during my thirty years existence."

"And you are prepared to be so again; but if I mistake not, Miss Fossanet wouldn't stand any foolin' round, as brother Jonathan has it."

"By Jove! who would think of trifling with such an imperial creature. If there is such a thing as love at first sight, I'm in love with her desperately already," and he laughed lightly as he spoke. "Did you never flirt?"

"No, that is a thing I hate," and then relapsing into his usual manner, "because it entails trouble and mountains of talk; can't afford to waste my vitality."

The following day the young men appeared at Rookwood and after partaking of the dainties and delicacies of luncheon, they went out on to the lawn with their host and his daughter. Pauline carried "The Ode of Life" and Stuart touching it said—

"You read Morris?"

"I'm not sure I care for this as much as his other works; the Ode on Love is too calm."

"As a rule everything connected with that passion is the reverse of calm," Denzil said, lazily—"case of 'Double, double toil and trouble.'"

"You speak like one experienced in such matters," Pauline said, with covert scorn, that seemed not to touch Ardoyne, for he spread out his hands contemptuously. "I—I have no experience save as a looker-on; in that character I have seen much of the game, and determined it is not worth the candle!"

With a slight condemnatory gesture, Pauline passed on with Stuart, leaving her father and Ardoyne to amuse each other. Mr. Fossanet fell asleep over his paper, and Denzil lay smoking with half-closed lids, watching furtively two figures moving with slow grace amidst the trees and flowers, catching now and again glimpses of a straw-coloured dress whose only ornaments were two knots of scarlet geraniums. Even his thoughts grew sleepy, and the two voices laughing and talking came to him like voices in a dream.

"Lovely," so ran his musing; "yes, lovely enough to tempt St. Anthony himself from celibacy, and her voice is like no other I ever heard; and when she does not speak her eyes

"Fill with light  
The interval of sound."

"Stuart's caught in the toils again; this time he won't find escape so easily should he wish it."

He must have dozed, for he gave a great start when a voice said—

"Is he asleep, Mr. Ainslie?" and looking up with customary coolness remarked—

"No, Miss Fossanet; I'm never caught napping."

"Then you were thinking?" she questioned, sitting down close by him.

"I'm never guilty of such a grave misdemeanour; thinking is conducive to gray hairs and crow's feet."

"You are an enigma to me, Mr. Ardoyne. Do you understand him?" lifting wonderful eyes to Stuart Ainslie's fair, handsome face.

"How should I? He doesn't understand himself," laughing and shrugging his shoulders; "but he really isn't a bad sort; as you, Denzil?"

"Don't know, but I'm content to take your word for it; it's too hot for argument of any kind, and I am in no mood to analyse my own character."

"Is your laziness real or assumed?" Pauline questioned, as she busied herself with her flowers, and Denzil, with a tremendous stretch, said—

"It is constitutional I believe; but why will you persist in cross-examining me? For my word I'm not worth the trouble, Miss Fossanet."

"I don't believe you are," coolly—"and yet you ought to be."

"Why?" lifting himself on his elbow the better to look at her; "pray tell."

Pauline's colour heightened a little, but she said, gravely and calmly—

"Your face seems to betoken much strength of will, much depth of passion; not all your laziness can do away with the firm curve of your mouth, the obstinacy of your chin. I beg your pardon, I speak too freely."

"Not at all. Go on, I like you to talk, it saves me the trouble of doing it myself."

Stuart laughed, but Pauline said—

"You have disappointed me; if I had never spoken to you I should have said you were capable of generosity and bravery."

"So he is," Stuart broke in. "A poor fellow forged his name to an awful extent and he forgave him—"

"Too much trouble to prosecute; that and not generosity made me forgive."

"Oh! confound that!" Stuart said, quickly; "if you are not generous allow you are not a coward. We were in Scotland—"

"That's enough, Ainslie!" but his friend harried on regardless of remonstrance.

"We stayed at a place where a bride and bridegroom were spending their honeymoon; the bridegroom was in the habit of taking a sail every morning on the lake at a little distance from the house—"

"Really, Ainslie, I'm surprised at your ill-taste. You are boring Miss Fossanet."

"One morning," the other went on, "the boat overturned, and there stood the bride upon the shore shrieking wildly, whilst we were paralysed with fear, for her husband could not swim, and we were afraid to venture in."

He paused, and Denzil lay plucking blades of grass in a resigned way.

"Go on," Pauline said, softly, with her eyes fixed on Stuart's.

"Only one man amongst us had courage enough to attempt a rescue—he was fortunate enough to succeed."

"And that man, Mr. Ardoyne, was yourself?" questioned the girl, gravely.

"The same, Miss Fossanet," lifting his hat with mock ceremony.

"And pray what impelled you to that heroic act? It would have been easier to let him drown," imitating his tone. "He was nothing to you."

"True, but his wife's screams disturbed and annoyed me. I thought a little exertion and a wetting preferable to them."

"I wish I could read you as you are; stripped bare of your cynicism and general air



of languor. Is it impossible, Mr. Ainslie, to surprise him into his real character?"

"Nothing is impossible to you," with an emphasis on the pronoun that brought a richer tint to the olive cheek.

"You are pleased to flatter me," almost coldly; then in a lighter tone, "see what lovely contrasts I have here, crimson roses and yellow picotees, scarlet geraniums and lobelia."

"May I beg a flower," Stuart asked, softly, leaning towards her a little, and she answered composedly,—

"Choose for yourself," and held them up for his inspection.

"May I have this?" he questioned, selecting a tiny bud, and fastening it in his coat.

"Now, Mr. Ardoyne, it is your turn; which do you prefer?"

"Thanks, I won't rob you of one, what is the use? They fade so quickly, and then what is their value? Sounds barbarous, doesn't it?"

"Yes; and ungracious," quietly tying her blossoms together with a wisp of grass. As a study you are interesting, as a man you are—

"Contemptible," as she paused: "say anything you please, Miss Fossanet, you will never offend me; I am beyond anger, my general indolence gives me a delightful immunity from all passions."

So from day to day the two young men were found at Rookwood, and Stuart began to exhibit a pronounced admiration for Pauline which pleased both his father and hers; Mr. Ainslie did his best to throw the two together, not only because he really liked Pauline, but because he thought if Stuart married her he would settle at Tenville and so he should keep him always by him.

To them all Denzil Ardoyne remained just as much a puzzle as on that first day at Rookwood, and Miss Fossanet found herself despising him for his empty, useless mode of life, his cynicism and profession of utter disregard for others. He was a splendid foil to Stuart who was all life and animation, generous to an extravagant pitch; kindly, in his careless way, to all about him, he soon made himself the idol of the village, and Ella would carry her beautiful foster-sister tales of his chivalry and generosity, and together the two girls contrasted him with Denzil Ardoyne, and the latter suffered by the comparison. He knew it, but it did not seem to affect him in the least, and one day he remarked drawlingly,—

"I know you despise me, Miss Pauline, and if I could be energetic I should hate you in return; but you see I can't, and if it's any pleasure to you to despise me, pray do so."

"I should like to think well of you; but you won't let me," flushing hotly.

"The effort to appear other than I am would be too great for me," calmly; and each day as her scorn of him deepened, Stuart rose in her favour, and soon she began to look for his coming with eager expectation, to take keen delight in listening to his voice, to thrill at the touch of his hand, or under his passionate glances, and all watching said, "They love each other."

A more gracious tender light flooded the lovely purple eyes, a new happiness flushed the divine face, robbing it of much of the old pride, and a trembling gladness stole through the tones of her rich, low voice. Denzil read the signs of the times, but did not show what he saw until one night when he had lured Stuart into his own particular den at Milden House. From behind a cloud of smoke his voice came almost drawlingly,—

"You love Miss Fossanet, Ainslie?"

"Better than my life; hang it man, you must know I do."

"I've heard you protest the same thing half-a-dozen times, about half-a-dozen different girls. I don't place such reliance on you in that respect."

"You're frank," with a light laugh; "fact is I've been a long time learning my own mind. I know it now, and the world holds only one

woman for me, and that woman is Pauline Fossanet."

"Sounds pretty; question is, will your present infatuation last?"

"Credit me with some constancy. Of course a man can't go on falling in and out of love to the end of his days, and this time I'm netted. By Jove, I'd marry Pauline to-morrow if she'd have me; there's always been something lacking in my flames, but she is perfection. Why, man, she is divine!"

"So was the pretty flower-girl at Nice," coolly. "At least for six weeks—then you tired of the poor child and only longed to get away from her."

"She was so woefully ignorant," spreading out deprecatory hands; "and her ignorance grew upon one and disgusted one."

"Granted, but you cannot urge the same excuse for your desertion of Lady Gwen; highborn, wealthy, accomplished, and acknowledged lovely."

"Ah! but her voice, Denzil—it thrilled through one's head, and made me think what she could be in a passion. I have never known love until now."

"Found your kindred soul at last?" cynically. "Allow me to congratulate you."

"Laugh as you will, one day your turn will come, and then the laugh will be on my side. I assure you you won't find me very merciful."

"If such a thing should ever be; if I shall show myself as mad as my fellows, you may ridicule me to your heart's content. I shall deserve it."

"I once was very near making a fool of myself, I own," said Stuart, thoughtfully, and Denzil interrupted him with—"Is that a rare occurrence?" and received a blow on the head with a book for his pains.

"Shut up, while I make a clean breast. She was a governess, and very pretty. I was staying in the house where she was. It was two years ago, and you had left me to meet old Bray at Toulon, so of course I got into mischief; but she was the daintiest, prettiest little creature imaginable, and I was soon her sworn knight. But my hostess had a regard for my welfare, and so summarily dismissed her. Poor little soul, how she sobbed, and I tried to comfort her; but what could I do, I daren't marry her! I hadn't a cent of my own—all I have comes from the governor—and if I had chosen a poor wife, with no birth worth mentioning, much as he cares for me, he would have cast me off."

Stuart could not see his friend's face through the clouds and rings of smoke, but his voice sounded somewhat sharper than usual, as he questioned—"And what came of your inamorata, Stuart?"

"For six months I corresponded with her (you were curious to know as to whom my correspondent was, but for once I held my tongue); then I gradually forgot her, ultimately she faded out of my life."

"It strikes me," coolly, "Miss Fossanet should marry a better man than you."

## CHAPTER II.

STUART AINSIE had won golden opinions from all. Mr. Fossanet declared himself more than pleased with him. Pauline said nothing, it was not her way to speak much of what lay deepest in her heart, but a pair of brown eyes watching read the story of her love, the love that had come to her unsought, unbidden, and made her life perfect in its beauty. She was one not to love lightly, and all through her three seasons her heart had never throbbed more quickly, her pulses had never stirred at the coming or going of any admirer or embryo lover. Men had called her cold, women had stigmatised her indifference as pride and love of self, but she had gone on her way, not hearing, or if hearing, not heeding anything that passed around. A proud woman? yes, but most tender, most womanly, capable of supreme self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice.

As August passed into September, and September merged into October, a new, keener

sense of love and life thrilled her whole being, lit up her glorious eyes, flushed the pale olive of cheeks and throat, breathed through her tones, made her step light, and her low laugh more musical; and Stuart Ainslie's heart grew glad with the knowledge that his love was returned.

In those days Denzil Ardoyne saw very little of him, but when they met his talk was all of Pauline; and Denzil would listen with critical glances, and now and then interrupt him with cynical speech that called forth a laughing rebuke from the happy lover. One night he said, "Oh, Ardoyne, I've something to tell you."

"Fire away," slowly and languidly.

"To-morrow I am going to put my fate to the test."

"Had I been you I would have waited until I knew the result before I made a confidante of anyone."

"Probably you would, but we are not all so cold-blooded as you; besides, old boy, there should be confidence between such friends as you and I, although I remember now you have never told me anything of yourself that I did not know."

"Never had anything to tell; no tale of love and jealousy, no secret ambition, no thorn in my side. Remember, Ainslie, I am a perfectly emotionless man. It amuses me to see the passions and simulated passions that make half my fellows miserable, but I stand aloof from them all."

"Upon my soul I believe you. But, Ardoyne, if I am successful, and I think I shall be, you will dance attendance at the ceremony as best man?"

"Don't know; the subject requires some consideration. I hate fuss and bother of any kind, and weddings are distinctly my aversion. Weeping friends, a sobbing bride, an insane, grinning bridegroom; a breakfast, and a departure of the happy couple, amidst a shower of rice and slippers. There's a wedding—causeless tears, a general boredom."

Stuart laughed. "Are you as much a cynic as you profess to be?"

"More so, but a fear of appearing eccentric prevents me indulging my cynicism to the fullest. Once win a character for eccentricity, and one is sought after and made much of—things that bore me."

He rose as he spoke, shook himself, and laying one hand on his friend's shoulder, said, "Well, success to your wooing, old man, if in truth you love Miss Fossanet. Remember she is a grand woman, but she won't stand any 'philandering' or nonsense. You must forewear all other loves, all foolish (but possibly pleasant) flirtations."

"Good heavens! man, I haven't an atom of flirtation left in my composition. I've sown my wild oats, and now intend figuring as model lover—model husband!"

"We shall see," carelessly; and he walked with Stuart to the door, and watching the handsome figure hurrying down the flower-bordered drive, he said to himself, "A bright, well-looking face, a debonnaire manner, and musical voice, have made many a man's fortune, and wrecked many a woman's life."

His face was dark with thought as he went back to the smoking-room, and catching sight of his gloomy brow, he smiled in the old cynical way.

"What would Ainslie believe and say had he seen me like that? It is against all my tenets to think."

But despite his utmost effort, when he reached his room his mind was too busy for sleep, and he lay tossing and too, thinking of all that Stuart had said, and what possibilities of happiness there were for Pauline.

"Perhaps I wrong him," he thought. "It may be that he does really love her with the one true love of a life, and if she is content to take him, why the risk is hers; and why I should concern myself in the least about her future is a riddle to me!"

The next morning Stuart presented himself

at Rookwood, and was received cordially by Mr. Fossanet, whom he found alone in the breakfast-room. With a mischievous smile, he said,—

"Is your visit to me, or Pauline?"  
"To both, sir," with no sign of embarrassment; "and to you first. I have to ask your permission to speak to Miss Fossanet. The fact is, I love her—and, with your consent, would make her my wife."

"How about the lady's answer?" smiling good-temperedly.

"I am not afraid of a refusal," confidently, "and I believe this marriage will please you quite as much as my father."

"You are an impudent young dog, and Pauline is in the garden."

"Thank you," and he stepped through the open French window on to a smooth, close-shaven lawn.

It was a bright, mild day in October, and many-coloured flowers yet lingered on the borders, and the mountain-ash, almost stripped of leaves, was yet bright with clusters of berries.

But Pauline was not in the garden, and Stuart turned his steps towards the conservatory, and was rewarded by seeing a tall figure, clad in darkest purple, moving to and fro amidst the plants and flowers.

He passed in, and at the opening of the door Pauline turned, her colour a little heightened—her eyes speaking the welcome she was too proud to give.

"You are early, Mr. Ainslie," putting down her flower-basket to shake hands with him, "and I always thought you a confirmed slug-gard!"

"You wronged me cruelly," laughing. "When there is occasion, I rise with the lark!"

"Unfortunately the occasion rarely offers itself," she said, with her slow and beautiful smile. "Tell me what it was that induced you to do so this morning?"

She took up her scissors as she spoke, and began cutting more blossoms, he watching her with passionate eyes.

"I came to see Mr. Fossanet on some very important business."

"Yes; but I thought business was not much in your line, Mr. Ainslie?"

"It concerned you," drawing near, and possessing himself of one hand; and then all her pride and composure forsook her, and she stood with downcast eyes, blushing, trembling, conscious as a maid of seventeen. "My darling," and the musical voice was very, very tender, "I came to ask for your love; to assure you that my life without you would be a misery to me. Ah! dear, how I love you!"

He paused; then, growing bolder, leant towards her and kissed her cheek, and at the touch of his lips she looked up, her eyes flooded with light, and although he knew, without aid of speech, what her answer was, he urged,—

"What will you say to me, my dearest?"

Her voice was very low, but clear and steady.

"I love you!"

No shame in the confession, only tender pride and suppressed joy that he had found her so fair that he desired her for his wife.

Ah, the lover's rapture! Surely it could not be so sweet, so unalloyed to him as to her, for he had drunk often of love's cup with smiling, careless lips; whilst to her the draught was new, and intoxicant as wine, and her heart had known no passion—no semblance of passion—until he woke it to life, and taught it love's lesson.

He held her close in his arms, her dark head lay upon his shoulder, and her glorious mystical eyes were lifted to his, and he saw them full of a love, rising to the sublimity of worship!

"Pauline, my dear, my dear! what happy days we will have!" he whispered in that moment's madness of joy. "I'm a poor fellow at best for you to throw your heart upon,

but I think you will never regret giving yourself to me, because I love you so well!"

"Ah," she said, "I am very happy now!" and clung about him.

He kissed her sweet mouth, her beautiful throat, that flushed under his caress.

"Dear heart, are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied?" she echoed. "Oh, more, far more than that! Are not you?"

"No; I never shall be satisfied until you are indeed my own; and you will come to me soon? There is nothing to delay our marriage."

"It must be as you and my father wish."

She paused, and blushed.

"And you?" he questioned, bending his head until his fair hair mingled with the dark waves that crowned her queenly brow.

"I shall be content to come when you ask," she whispered, too truthful to attempt to conceal the strength and depth of her love, or the ready obedience she tendered him. He caught her closer, and said, with an exultant laugh,—

"Then I shall not be long in saying 'come.' My father will be pleased when he knows your answer; he is so attached to you, sings your praises so loudly that I am half-inclined to be jealous."

She could not jest in this first hour of acknowledged love; her heart was too full for laughter, so she clung about him in utter silence, until he said,—

"I wonder what Ardoyno will think of this?"

"Does he ever think?" somewhat sarcastically, "and, if so, his opinion can matter little to us. I dislike his method of treating friendship and love."

"That is only a peculiarity of his. He is a very good sort, and one day you will acknowledge this. I wish he were more of a favourite with you."

"I will try to conquer my prejudice, if prejudice it is, and count your friend mine—if he will let me. There is father calling! Let us go!"

And he led her out into the sunshine with a pride in his new treasure that sat well and gracefully upon him.

That evening Ardoyno and he dined at Rookwood, and the former's greeting to Pauline was characteristic.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you, Miss Fossanet, but my conscience goes against it. Make the most of your single blessedness. You won't find much happiness in the married state."

"Your congratulations take the form of warning and prophecies of coming ill," with a half-disdainful smile, whilst Stuart broke in,—

"You must pay no heed to Ardoyno. He knows nothing of married bliss or woe, and yet he speaks like a henpecked husband. It's only his way."

"Don't trouble yourself to defend me," Denzil smiled languidly. "Miss Fossanet isn't credulous, and will prefer to trust the evidence of her senses to anything you may say of me."

After that he saw less and less of Stuart, and his visits to Rookwood grew very rare, so that Mr. Fossanet, who liked him without understanding him in the least, remonstrated with him, asking if he had any cause for anger against them.

"My dear sir, no," with his customary calmness; "but lately I have been too indolent to pay calls or cultivate my neighbours in the least. Come down and spend this evening with me. I shall not invite Miss Fossanet, as I have neither wife nor mother to play hostess, besides which the young lady in question tolerates me for Stuart's sake only."

"Oh, nonsense! Pauline is neither demonstrative nor gushing, but I think you are mistaken in supposing she dislikes you. In fact, I believe as a study you interest her."

"But I object to being considered in the light of a study," carelessly. "I like to go on my way unnoticed. Well, I shall expect you this evening."

And he passed on with a grave bow and the

merest gleam of a smile in his fine brown eyes, whilst Mr. Fossanet stood watching him, a perplexed look on his face.

The following day Stuart drove to Milden House, and, having persuaded Denzil to accompany him, made at once for Rookwood, where they found Pauline dressed, and waiting for them. Denzil greeted her with a deprecatory gesture.

"Miss Fossanet, I have been completely sold. I had not the faintest idea Ainslie was bound for Rookwood, or that I was expected to play the unenviable third part, and can only beg you to endure my society with your usual good grace and forbearance."

"It is we who should apologise for inflicting our unworthy selves upon you," the girl answered, with a low laugh, and allowed Stuart to help her into the seat beside him, whilst Denzil sprang into his place behind, and in this fashion they drove through the village, Stuart laughing at the trick he had played upon his friend.

They drove down quiet roads and lanes that in the summer time were fragrant with limes and meadow-sweet, and Denzil listened to Pauline's low, rich voice talking well and earnestly, missed the dreary platitudes in which so many girls indulge, and wondered much in his own mind at the exceeding graciousness and beauty of her manner and words.

The sun was getting low when Stuart turned the horse's head towards home, and a chill wind had sprung up, so that Denzil, leaning forward, said,—

"I hope, Miss Fossanet, you are well supplied with wraps? The wind is north-east."

"Thank you, yes; but I am not cold, and I am very strong."

For a moment a look of admiration lit up his eyes as they rested on her flushed and beautiful face, her superb figure so instinct with vitality; but the look died out as she turned and spoke again.

"Do you know, Mr. Ardoyno, I have never had a day's illness in my life; headache—a malady common to my sex, is totally unknown to me. It sounds dreadful, doesn't it; but it's true," laughing softly.

"You are a favoured mortal," he answered with his usual languor, "and as curious in your way as you say I am in mine," and breaking in upon his words came a child's screams; the horse reared and plunged, and as Stuart held the reins more tightly he muttered something ugly below his breath; at a rapid rate they turned a bend and saw the village blacksmith unmercifully beating his eldest child, a delicate slip of a girl not more than ten.

Pauline shuddered as the heavy strap descended on the bare shoulders, and cried out to Stuart to interfere.

"The horse is enough for me to manage," he said, almost sharply; "and I daresay she deserves it."

Sick at heart the girl turned to Denzil, just in time to see him spring down and fling himself upon the cowardly brute; in another moment his hand was in his collar, and with one effort he hurled him to the side-walk, and faced him with flashing eyes and changed expression.

"She's my child," the man said sullenly. "I shall beat her if I like."

"Not when I am near," his breath coming short between his clenched teeth, and he did not heed that Stuart had reined in, or that Pauline's eyes were fixed on him in amazed admiration.

"You brute!" he said, "what had the child done to deserve such punishment?"

"Broke a bottle and spilt my beer," he said savagely, "and I'll take it out of her."

Denzil laid his hand on the trembling, sobbing little maid.

"Come up to the house this evening; and as for you," flashing on her father, "you shall have the price of your beer, but don't let me know you assault your child in this fashion again. Do you hear? I should not let you off so easily another time."



He sprang into the dog-cart.

"Drive on, Ainslie," he said, sharply, and Stuart flicked the horse with his whip.

"If you're going to play knight-errant in that fashion, Ardoyne, you'll always be embroiled in some low quarrel."

Pauline's lips quivered.

"You have disappointed me, Stuart," she said, scarcely above a whisper, and no word of his could win her to smiles during the remainder of the drive.

When they reached Rookwood Denzil was his usual languid self, save for a mortified look in his eyes; Pauline gave him her hand.

"Mr. Ardoyne, I can't say how much you have pleased me; and for once I have seen you as you are, without your mask."

And for once he had no reply ready, he only bowed over her hand, and looked as if he would have kissed it had not Stuart stood by; then slowly relinquishing it he moved away, and Pauline entered the house with a feeling of displeasure in her heart against her lover.

"My dear," he said, deprecatingly, "you cannot wish me to make the people's quarrels and grievances mine; and the man had a perfect right to chastise his own child for carelessness. The little wretch's screams frightened Wildfire, too. I wonder we weren't all thrown—"

"Don't say any more," with what he called her Cleopatra air. "I want to keep my faith in you whole and entire; love without faith is misery."

But the cloud was transient, and the following day Pauline was her usual gracious, loving self; she went running downstairs to meet her lover.

"I've news for you, Stuart!"

"Tell on," drawing her to him, and kissing the proud, beautiful mouth.

"Thank you. I will now you have set me free," smiling. "Father is going away. How I shall miss him! He has actually never left me to my own devices since I was twelve years old; and Aunt Mary is coming here to play propriety. How will you like that?"

"Not at all, unless Aunt Mary is a particularly good sort. And where is Mr. Fossanet bound for, and for how long a time?"

"One question at a time, if you please. He is going to Ollerton to visit an old friend, and will probably be away a fortnight."

"Ollerton! I used to know a girl who 'hailed' from there, as they say in America, and had she distrusted him she would have heard the nervous ring in his laugh."

"Did you?" with interest; "who was she, Stuart? and was she pretty?"

"She was very pretty, and her name was Alison Forbes," coolly.

"Alison Forbes! why she must be the eldest daughter; her father is rector of Ollerton, and my father's oldest friend. They are very poor, I believe, and the family is large. Did you know Alison well?"

"Yes; she was governess at Lady Farningham's when I was there."

"All the girls work, at least those who are old enough to; but just now Alison is out of employment, and I have asked father to bring her here for a change."

"Do you know her well, Pauline?" with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"I, no! I have never even seen her; neither has father since she was a child; but I have heard glowing accounts of her beauty and sweetness of disposition."

"I should say she would be very amiable, but she is far too pretty to obtain a situation in a family where there are marriageable sons, she has dainty, fascinating ways, and is altogether a lovable little soul."

"Then I shall certainly like her, and sometimes I sorely need feminine society. I wish I had had a sister."

"That she might join with you in turning men's heads and damaging their hearts?" laughing lightly, then kissing her passionately.

"Love, how beautiful you are! Ardoyne says you deserve a better fellow for a husband than your humble servant—like his impudence, isn't

it? But he is a capital fellow, despite his languor and indifference."

"I think he is," gravely. "The one glimpse I had of his real nature has entirely blotted out any prejudice I may have had; but it is a pity he should be at such pains to hide his good qualities."

"Don't praise him too highly or I shall be jealous," smoothing gently the masses of waving black hair.

She looked up more quickly than was her wont.

"Jealous!" she said. "Ah, you are jesting! Jealousy is an ignoble passion, and should not have its home where love reigns."

"There is no true love without jealousy!" he answered, swiftly.

She smiled, and shook her head.

"In my heart there is no room for doubt of you, consequently no room for the green-eyed monster. I trust you all in all, and claim equal trust in you."

But Stuart did not look very well at ease as he walked through the village. He did not like the idea of Pauline and Alison meeting, and yet knew of no way in which he could prevent an encounter without incurring suspicion; so as was the way with him in all cases of perplexity, he went straight to Denzil who received him with the greatest nonchalance.

"I'm in a quandary, Ardoyne," he said, flinging himself into a chair, and knitting his brows. "Fossanet is going down to Ollerton Rectory for a fortnight, and will, I believe, bring the eldest daughter of the house back with him. I very much wish to prevent her coming here. I don't want Pauline to meet her; as it is, things won't be too pleasant for me."

"Why, in the name of fortune?" indifferently, being used to Stuart's outbursts.

"Why the girl is the little governess I told you about, and it's awkward."

"It is," assented Denzil, coolly. "Always told you your way of falling in love with every girl you meet would get you into a scrape soon or late."

"You're a regular Job's comforter!" savagely. "Now what am I to do?"

"Make a clean breast of it to Miss Fossanet; there's nothing else you can do."

"Hang it, man! that's just what I don't want to do. I love her too well to risk losing her. I can't do it, upon my honour I can't. Jealousy plays the deuce with women, you know, and Pauline's awfully proud."

"Yes, far too proud ever to be jealous. Trust her entirely, and you won't have much cause for regret. Deceit she would not forgive."

"Your advice may be good, but I can't follow it, and if you've no other suggestion to offer, I may as well go. Perhaps I shall find a way out of the bother," and he sauntered out, leaving Denzil with moody face and cloudy brow.

"He'll give her cause for sorrow yet," he muttered, while his brow grew more set, and his eyes darkened. "And she will suffer as few women can. Heavens! that she should love so weak a thing!" and being alone he forgot to wear the customary mask.

### CHAPTER III.

MR. FOSSANET'S fortnight had lengthened into three weeks and yet he said nothing of returning, but in his letters there was frequent mention of Alison Forbes, her grace and beauty, her domestic virtues, and her affectionate disposition, so that Pauline's curiosity was roused, and she was almost eager to welcome her to Rookwood.

Miss Mary Fossanet, however, did not like the tone of her brother's letters, but being a discreet woman she held it wisest to say nothing of the conviction filling her heart.

So the short winter days wore by pleasantly for Pauline, but not so happily for Stuart.

Each time she spoke of Alison his dread was renewed, and having left his "lady" each night, he would determine in the morning to

tell her all, but when morning came his resolve melted into thin air, and his courage failed him.

Worse than all, Denzil declined, cynically, but emphatically, to give him further advice.

"I have said all I intend saying on the subject. You found my advice not worth acceptance. I shall not presume to offer it again. You know how I hate being bored, or compelled to think seriously."

So in this way November wore to a close, and one day a letter came from Mr. Fossanet to his daughter, which drove the bright blood from her face and lips, and made her eyes flash with sudden anger.

She spread it out before her, and read it again and again before she seemed fully to comprehend its meaning, almost smiled at the excuses offered for the step he contemplated, the entreaties that she would not be angry.

The flash died out of her eyes as she sat thinking, and the proud lips took a gentle curve as she thought of his unvarying kindness to her. How he had been father and mother too, and though her heart was sore it was not from anger any longer.

"Ah!" she said, to herself, "he would have been very lonely without me, and I shall leave him in June, and perhaps she will make him happier than I ever could. But I wish he had chosen an older woman to put in my mother's place, and to rule here." Then she went down to her aunt.

"Aunt Mary," she said, with customary directness, "father is going to be married."

Down went the endless knitting and up went the white hands in horror.

"My poor child! And, pray, who is he going to marry—not that I need ask?"

"Alison Forbes. You don't look very surprised, aunt!"

"I'm not. All his letters have pointed to that conclusion; only I thought I would not harass you with what might be unnecessary worry. What are we to do? You can't submit to become second here; and Stuart must marry you as soon as possible. She is a designing girl, I've no doubt; and, excuse me, my dear, your father is an old fool."

Pauline spoke slowly.

"At first I was very angry, but I am not now. I have thought how lonely he would be when I am gone, and if she makes him happy I ought to be happy too. I confess my heart is sore enough just now, but it would be selfish to wish to keep father lonely, so that I might always be first with him."

"Well, if you are satisfied, of course I have nothing to say against the marriage; but very few girls would accept such a change as easily as you are doing, and I don't believe in marriage where there is a very great disparity in age. I'm afraid Thomas will live to be sorry for this step."

"I hope not with all my heart; and, aunt, you will try with me to receive the bride as she should be received. The wedding is to take place in a fortnight, and father, wishing it to be very quiet, thinks it unnecessary for us to go down to Ollerton. That is a piece of consideration for which I am thankful."

"Well, my dear," the maiden lady said, reproachfully, "I always thought you had too high a spirit to submit to this sort of thing, and for your mother's sake you should, at least, remonstrate with your infatuated father. The Forbes are as poor as the proverbial church mouse, and this girl is marrying him for his money."

"Now, that remark is unlike you, and you apparently forget father is handsome, cheery, and looks ten years younger than he really is. She may love him."

Miss Fossanet coughed incredulously, and Pauline went out and down to the kitchen to give orders for the day; then she climbed the stairs to her room, and sat down to think.

Her heart was very sore. It was hard to have this unknown girl usurp the place in her father's heart and home that she had held since her mother died—hard to be thrust from his bosom for this interloper.

But she was generous and unselfish as she was beautiful, and before the morning had passed she had conquered her pride and the rebellion of filial love, and was ready to write her cordial congratulations—ready to welcome the bride with warmth and all due deference. Stuart was glad, indeed, to hear that pretty Alison was soon to be Mrs. Fossanet. He argued to himself that now Pauline would never know his former penchant for the pretty governess—that, as a wife, she must be silent concerning it, and so his course was clear, and it would be all smooth sailing now.

But Denzil knit his brows, and said, in his heart,—

"Trouble will come of this, and Ainslie is a fool not to make a clean breast of it, while he has the chance," but when he spoke thus to Stuart he laughed carelessly. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil, my boy, and you always look on the darkest side."

So a fortnight passed, and Pauline had schooled herself to meet Alison in a truly friendly spirit; and now she stood in the hall waiting to welcome the fair-haired girl that her father was assisting from the carriage.

She stood on the topmost step—a tall, imperial figure, gracious, graceful, courteous; and Mr. Fossanet, coming up lightly, his bride on his arm, kissed her, and looked relieved that the ordeal was over.

Pauline gave her hand to the new mistress. "I hope you will be very happy here," she said, sincerely, "and that we shall be the best of friends," and so drew her into the house and to her room.

The bride's eyes, full of grateful tears, met hers.

"You are very good to me. I have been so afraid to meet you, although Thomas assured me I need not be so. But most girls object to a stepmother."

Pauline looked into the lovely mignon face with a strange tenderness growing in her heart.

"You are very beautiful," she said. "I am not surprised that father loved you."

Over face and brow spread a hot blush, and, with fingers that trembled a little, the bride removed her hat.

"You will try to love me for my own sake," she said, timidly, and lifted lovely violet eyes to the dark face above; "I should hate to think I had spoiled your home life, or marred your happiness," and there was a deprecating tone in the treble voice.

Pauline smiled. "You must not harass yourself with thoughts like those, we are going to be very happy together. I shall call you Alison, because any other term applied by me to you would be absurd. Now I'll leave you, as, doubtless, you would like to rest a little before dinner."

The next morning Stuart made his appearance, and, although Alison blushed deeply at meeting him, there was nothing either in her manner or Stuart's to lead any observer to suppose they were old-time acquaintances. Both had been prepared for this ordeal, and Stuart really felt no annoyance of any kind; but with Alison the case was different. He had been her first lover, and he had been faultless—flawless to her, and when he deceived and forgot her she had almost broken her heart over his treachery.

Long ago she had told herself all was forgotten, but she knew it was not so; and, when she stood at the altar with Thomas Fossanet, her heart had cried out for Stuart, her stepdaughter's lover. She liked and esteemed her husband, but she would never have married him but for the pressure brought to bear on her by her parents and brothers. They were, indeed, terribly poor, and if Alison would consent to marry her father's old friend, many advantages would accrue to them from the union. Affectionate, obedient, weak, she had obeyed—and what would be the result?

Denzil Ardoyna, with languid eyes that seemed to see nothing that passed around, yet watched with vague fear in his heart, and saw the daily change in pretty Mrs. Fossanet, the

alternate melancholy and almost hysterical gaiety of her manner, the shrinking dread in her lovely violet eyes.

At first Stuart had held very much aloof from her, but now that the first strangeness of their new relations had worn away he was often with her—laughing, talking in his careless way, that yet was always tender towards women. Alison tried to avoid him, but could not, and, after awhile, made no effort to do so, being a weak little thing at best; and Pauline, too proud—too generous either for jealousy or suspicion, was glad because of the friendliness between them. She had taken a sincere liking to her pretty stepmother, and made her way very smooth for her.

But, as spring came on, a subtle change evinced itself in Stuart's manner, palpable enough to Denzil (who saw his friend's faults very clearly), but unsuspected by Pauline, who had, as she once said, no room for doubt of him in her heart. He did not seem so anxious to be with her alone, and his eyes, when they met hers, had something of repugnance in them.

Denzil took him to task.

"Ainslie, I'm going to speak some unpleasant truths—"

And Stuart interrupted, flippantly,— "Is that anything new, old man? Go ahead."

"I can't think," the other said, sternly, "that you would wantonly cause disunion in so happy a home as Rookwood; but you are in a very fair way to do so."

"Oh! good lord, I'm in for a lecture," fighting his cigar, and glancing at Denzil from beneath half-closed, heavily-fringed lids.

"What have I been doing lately that merits your displeasure?"

"What you are doing day by day?—neglecting Miss Fossanet, and philandering about with that pretty, weak little soul to whom your word is law."

"Would you have me behave like a bear to her because we were once something more than friends?" almost angrily. "I fail to see what wrong I do in talking or walking with her. I am an engaged man, she a married woman—where is the danger to either?"

"It is needless for me to say, ask your own conscience; and once before I told you Miss Fossanet would not be any man's dupe. If once she suspects the true state of affairs she will break with you, and you will get your deserts."

"Hang it, Ardoyna, it is only a little innocent flirtation that can hurt no one."

"Flirtation!" the other echoed, between his teeth—"you dare to tell me it has gone so far? You are worse than I thought you. You take advantage of Miss Fossanet's trust and Alison Fossanet's weakness. I tell you plainly this must be ended, or I will speak out; I won't stand by and see such grievous wrong done to any man or woman."

Stuart's face flushed, and his eyes flashed angrily, but something in Denzil's manner held him quiet for a moment, and when he spoke it was with moderation.

"You know what a careless, graceless fellow I have always been; let that be my excuse. Of course I love Pauline, but, you see, she always lives in the 'heights,' and I can't; sometimes I am compelled to seek relaxation, and I didn't think I was harming old Fossanet or his pretty wife."

"You didn't think!" contemptuously—"a child's excuse, and one you should be ashamed to offer; and as for Miss Fossanet living in the heights, you did not complain of that once. I tell you plainly, if this trifling is not ended I shall speak to her, so that justice may be done to herself and her father."

"Oh! you shall have no cause to do that," impatiently, "and you're making a mountain of a molehill; besides, you can't expect me to behave like a schoolboy under your unnecessary rebukes," and he flung himself out of the room with a muttered curse.

For weeks Denzil had no cause for complaint, and it was now May. In early June

Pauline was to be married, and the man who had exerted himself on her behalf tried to be glad in the thought and could not—told himself it was a happy way out of difficulties, and yet would have given his right hand to prevent the match.

In the middle of May a promenade concert was given by Mr. Ainslie in his own grounds, and to it all the *élite* of the county were invited. Denzil Ardoyna, looking excessively bored, was there, walking with Pauline; Mr. Fossanet, to his disgust, had been captured by a fat dowager, and Alison followed with Stuart. Girls and men laughed, flirted to their hearts' content, or sat apart in couples, listening to the popular airs performed by the band.

"Oh, Miss Fossanet, this is awful," said Denzil, languidly. "I feel like Horace Walpole—that I have murdered a man whose name was 'Ennui,' and now his ghost haunts me; that I have people in my pockets and on my shoulders. I should like to get free of them for a time; to find myself on a desert island would be bliss indeed."

Pauline lifted gravest eyes to his.

"Mr. Ardoyna, you are an arrant hypocrite. You wear your mask even to your best friends, and so often wound them."

One moment the cynicism left his face, and he seemed about to speak earnestly; but just then Mr. Fossanet, having rid himself of his dowager joined them with the question,—

"Where are Alison and Stuart?"

"I thought they were behind," Pauline said, unsuspiciously.

And Denzil remarked in a casual way,—

"I will look for them—they would be easily lost in this crowd; but first let me find you a seat. I am sure Miss Fossanet is tired."

He discovered one under a great chestnut, and leaving father and daughter went in search of the truant couple.

He moved through the gay crowd with languid ease and insufferable face, but his heart was black with rage against Stuart, and scorn for Alison's weakness.

For a time he was unsuccessful in his search, although he left no walk unsearched. But finally he thought of an arbour hidden away amongst trees and bushes, where he and Stuart had passed many a pleasant morning.

So he hastened in that direction, and parting the thick growth of bushes made for the arbour. He paused a moment as the sound of a woman's voice, broken with sighs and tears, stole out on the balmy air.

"Oh, you are very cruel! and we wrong him by these confidences and stolen meetings. He has been most good and generous to me, and Pauline is an angel. No, I will not see you alone any more. I am weak—I have pity!"

Denzil started forward, waiting to hear so more; and when they saw his stern, white face Stuart sprang up with an oath, whilst Alison crouched down with hidden eyes, crying brokenly,—

"Ah, Heaven! I am ruined—ruined!"

"You have broken faith with me," Ardoyna said, hoarsely. "You are a scoundrel and a knave, but I shall speak to you some other time. Madam," turning to Alison, "I will take you to your husband."

He drew her hand in his arm, and, bidding her make an effort to appear calm, took her into the open ground, and began piloting his way through the crowd.

"Oh," she said, falteringly, "how you must scorn me; what are you going to do? shall you tell him of my wicked weakness?"

"Heaven knows I will spare you if I can, but I have had no time for thought. I dine at Rookwood to-day—give me half-an-hour if possible; remember, if you refuse I must disclose what I know, for his sake and for her."

"I have been very guilty, very weak, but I am not so wicked as you believe me. I have tried to do my duty, tried to avoid Stuart."

"Hush!" he said, "people will hear you," and led her back to her husband.

Stuart did not join Pauline for some con-



admirable time, and pleaded then indisposition as the cause of his silence, and for the same reason he absented himself from Rookwood that evening.

Determined at any risk to speak to Alison about her very unworthy conduct, Denzil tried her out upon the terrace, leaving Pauline to entertain her father.

"We've state secrets to discuss," he said, with a careless laugh, and they passed out together.

For a time both were silent, then he said,—"Mrs. Fossanet, I do not wish to stand in the capacity of judge, but that of friend to you, and you are doing a very foolish and wicked thing in encouraging Ainslie's attentions."

"Encouraging them!" she echoed, piteously. "Oh, indeed, you wrong me; ever since I came here I have done my best to avoid him, but I am neither clever nor strong, and—and—" she paused suddenly, and grew paler.

"And you loved him once, if not now," plying. "I know your story, and am sorry for you; but having married Mr. Fossanet you must pay him the duty that is his due, and should have nothing to say to another man that he may not hear. If to-day's story were known you would lose all a woman prizes, and Stuart Ainslie is worth no sacrifice, however small. Weak, vacillating, false, thinking all charms divine but those he has just won, and, pardon me, you are treading on the brink of a fearful precipice. Be warned before it is too late."

A sort of weak wonder filled her mind as she listened to the grave, earnest voice she had never heard speak before save in cynical or languid tones.

"Oh!" she said, "I will do my best to atone for my sin; but oh, Heaven! how wretched I am!"

"Better be miserable than guilty; remember, if your meetings with Stuart Ainslie were discovered, you would have brought anguish and shame to those who hold you dear—to your husband, to Miss Fossanet."

"Heaven bless her!" she cried, "I will not bring trouble to her."

Long and earnestly he talked with her, then took her back to the house.

Mr. Fossanet asked with laughing curiosity what they had found to talk about, and Denzil covered his companion's confusion by answering lightly,—"Miss Fossanet and Stuart."

He sought an early opportunity to speak to his one true friend; but he resented his "interference" hotly, saying there was no room for it.

He and Alison had been talking of the past, which he admitted was foolish, and she had misunderstood him and accused him of coquetry. As for "stolen meetings," that was an exaggerated term applied by her to the chance interviews they had had, and in future he would thank Denzil to trouble his head about his own affairs.

And after that there was neither peace nor friendship between the men, and Pauline wondered why Stuart spoke so scornfully of Denzil, and why he (Denzil) never appeared at Rookwood when there was the smallest chance of meeting him.

She tried to make peace, but Stuart said Anyone had grossly insulted him, and she was obliged to desist. There was a change, too, in Alison she could not understand. Several times she found her in tears, and she seemed always anxious to avoid Stuart; she grew paler, thinner, and her beauty took a more frail appearance than ever.

"Father," Pauline said one day, "I don't want to alarm you, but I think Alison is not quite well, and it would be wise to call in Doctor Beck."

So Thomas Fossanet went to his girl-wife. "Pauline has been telling me you are not well (I should have seen it myself), and she advises me to call Beck in."

To his surprise she broke into bitter weep-

ing, and clinging about him implored him never to leave her, "not even for an hour," saying she felt insecure when he was away; imploring him always to love her, "although I am not a good wife."

He was really alarmed, and soothed her as a child. He had made a pet and a toy of her ever since their marriage, and it was to Pauline he always turned for advice.

Dr. Beck declared Mrs. Fossanet to be only nervous, and change of air and scene would soon restore her; but as Pauline's wedding-day was fast approaching it was out of the question that they should leave Rookwood, at least for a fortnight.

One evening Ella Marshall, Pauline's foster-sister, was crossing an open space between Mildon House and the village when she saw two figures at a little distance, and with a vague throb of fear she said to herself,—"That is Mr. Ainslie; but who is the woman, and what are they doing there?"

She hurried on, but long before she reached them they parted, and each went in an opposite direction. She followed quickly in the man's wake, but he doubled, and so she missed him; but she felt certain he was Stuart Ainslie.

She reached Rookwood and hurried through the grounds, and glancing towards the drawing-room, where the windows were open and still uncurtained, saw Stuart bending over Pauline in an attitude of love.

"I must have been mistaken," she thought, in a relieved way, and went down to the servants' hall; but later on she remembered some little neglected duty, and went running upstairs to perform it.

She went swiftly and lightly, and on the first landing overtook Mrs. Fossanet, who turned a white, weary face upon her.

"Is it you, Ella?" she questioned, pantingly. "I am tired and ill; please help me to my room!" and she caught at the girl's arm for support, and when she saw Ella's surprised look as her eyes rested on bonnet and mantle she added,—"

"My head ached so dreadfully I went into the grounds. Don't tell Miss Fossanet, it would alarm her needlessly."

Ella's face was white as she answered,—"I shall not tell her, madam."

And alone she wrestled with the thought in her heart.

"It could not be," she whispered, "it could not be! I am wicked, one moment to believe it."

But she was depressed and ill at ease all that night.

The hot bright days sped on, and they were marked by restless gaiety on Stuart's part, and perfect happy contentment on Pauline's. She had no fear, or shadow of fear, concerning her future. She loved Stuart so entirely, trusted him so implicitly, "and he returned her love and trust." What then could be the result of their union but perfect happiness?

So her wedding eve came, and she had especially begged Stuart to effect a reconciliation with Denzil, as she wished him to be present at the breakfast, and Stuart had done as she wished, so that there was nothing to mar her content.

A dozen times Ella had held the ivory satin dress out at arm's length for her mistress to admire, had persuaded her to put on wreath and veil, and had laughed in her delight at Pauline's loveliness.

"I must be up early to-morrow," she said. "There will be so much to do, and no one but myself shall touch the bride," and mistress and maid parted with a good-night.

Pauline sat down and indulged in a review of her past happy life, which yet had been incomplete until Stuart's love filled and crowned it.

It was quite late when she finally composed herself for sleep, and the tired eyes closed readily, so that soon she was dreaming happy dreams of days spent wholly with Stuart.

As the first streak of light crept into Ella's room she woke, and drawing back the curtains

gave a little sigh of pleasure at the promise in the sky of a fair day. Then she sprang out and began to dress hastily. Once she looked out into the garden and saw a dark figure stealing along the elm walk, and she said audibly,—"

"What can Mrs. Fossanet be doing out at this time?" and hastily finishing her toilet, she went out, thinking Alison might be ill and need her; but there was no one in sight, only in the distance she heard the sound of carriage wheels, and she went back, a little wondering at this morning excursion, but nothing more.

Soon the other servants began to stir, and Ella busied herself making coffee for Pauline, and presently she went upstairs with it, and as she passed Mr. Fossanet's room she heard so hoarse and terrible a cry that the tray fell from her hands, the cup broke with a clatter, and the coffee stained her neat dress.

#### CHAPTER IV.

At the sound of that terrible cry Pauline woke, and started up in her bed, wondering sleepily what it meant, and from whence it came. There was a step outside, and, forgetting in her fear to knock, Ella opened the door, and entered with a frightened face. Pauline, thoroughly awakened now, asked, quickly,—"

"What is the matter, Ella? How terrified you look?"

"Oh, miss, I'm afraid Mr. Fossanet is ill; he is making a dreadful noise, and he is alone, I know, for I saw Mrs. Fossanet go out three hours ago."

In an instant Pauline had thrown on her dressing-gown, and was hurrying along the corridor. She knocked at his door, and receiving no answer, entered to find her father lying in his chair partially dressed, a slip of paper in his clenched hand. She crossed swiftly to his side, and drawing his head on her bosom asked,—"

"My dear, my dear, what is it? Are you ill? Speak to me," and kissed his brow.

"Read!" he said in a harsh voice; "read it to me. I—I am afraid I don't quite grasp its meaning," and he thrust the paper into her hand. It was blotted and blurred with many tears, and the writing was irregular, but she recognised it at a glance as Alison's. Full of terrible fear she began to read,—"

"Oh! how shall I tell you what you soon will know from others? how speak of the shame and sorrow I shall bring upon you? I would to Heaven I had never been born; I would to Heaven you had never cast your heart upon me, for I never was worthy you, and I did not love you. I have tried to be a good wife, I have tried to be true to Pauline, but I am weak, oh! so wickedly weak—and he is strong. When you wake I shall be gone away."

"Oh! if you cannot forgive (and that I dare not hope) pity me for my fall. If only I had not been coerced into marriage with you, I might now be a good and pure woman; oh, Heaven! how could I think I should fall so low? Tell Pauline—if words from such a guilty wretch as I, may reach her—that I strove to remember always that he was her accepted lover; soon to be her husband."

There the reader threw her hands above her head, and cried, in a low, intense voice,—"

"Oh, Heaven! what does it mean?" and then, with white face and quivering lips read on:—"

"But I loved him, and in the old days before he saw her (he loved me), and now I go with him to another land, where my shame shall not be known."

Pauline cast down the paper, and, falling on her knees beside her father, hid her face in her hands. He did not stir, he did not seem to see her agony, as he lay back with set, white lips and staring eyes. The girl beside him rocked to and fro, making no moan, shedding no tear, for the arrow had pierced too deeply for cries or lamentations. She heard her father groan—"Oh, Heaven! my wife, my

Alison!" and could not comfort him, could not look up because of the blind agony and shame that had fallen upon her. She heard the sound of the bridesmaids' voices, as they chattered over their toilets; she heard the stirring of servants below, and whispered to her stricken heart, "My wedding-day. Oh, Heaven!"

She seemed paralysed with woe, and when her father put out his hand and touched her, wailing,—“Have you nothing to say? Oh! comfort me, comfort me!” She looked up in a dull, blank way, scarcely comprehending what he said.

“She is gone, Pauline. Oh! the agony of it. Oh! the bitter, bitter shame!”

At the last word a tremor ran through all her frame, and her eyelids quivered.

“What shall we tell them?” referring to his guests. “How cover our dishonour. Oh Heaven! that he were here now, that he were at my mercy,” he started up, the veins all swollen and knotted on his temples.

“Father,” she moaned, and stretched her arms to him—“Father!”

At that dear word he turned, and stooping, caught her in his arms, raised her from her knees, clasped her to him, and burst into the hoarse, terrible sobs of an outraged broken-down man. She kissed him, but she could say no word of consolation. Her heart was too stricken for speech, or any feeling save that of her own woe; and so he sobbed on, and she clung about him as his tears fell upon her bosom.

At last she drew him into a chair, and with a great and terrible effort, spoke,—

“Who will tell them?” referring to their guests; but he made no answer, and a sudden stupor seemed to have fallen upon him. She was quick to realise this, and cried out, “Oh Heaven, in mercy, send me forgetfulness!” but she was strong, and no blissful time of unconsciousness came to her. She gave one swift glance at her father, whose face looked suddenly pinched and old, she stooped and picked up the letter she had not yet finished reading, then turning, slowly left the room, and went downstairs. Ella met her close by the library.

“Oh, Miss Pauline!” she cried, in alarm, “what is the matter with master. Oh! you are ill, and on your wedding-day.”

Pauline shivered, but she asked, apathetically, “Who has arrived, Ella?”

“Only Mr. Ardoyne, yet, miss,” wondering at the seemingly irrelevant question.

“Send him to me at once,” and she entered the library where Denzil soon joined her.

A shocked exclamation broke from him as he saw her altered face; but she advancing quietly gave Alison's letter into his hand.

“Read that,” she said. Her voice was dull and hard, and his heart throbbed with anxiety for her.

“You are very ill,” he said, but she interrupted,—

“Don't notice me,” and he began to read the hurriedly-written note. When he had finished, there was silence for the space of a minute, then he said,—

“Ah Heaven, that this should be. Pauline, what shall I say to you?” and his dusky face glowed with something far deeper than mere pity. She did not appear to notice that he had called her by her name, but she began to speak slowly,—

“I am glad you have come. How strange it is that in this trouble I should appeal to you for help—I don't think I could meet our guests—I don't think I could tell the story of her shame—and his desertion. Oh, Mr. Ardoyne, I loved them both so well,” and here for the first time her voice broke, and died utterly out.

He drew near, and touched her hand, and at that touch she seemed to gather strength, and so went on,—

“If I presume too far, please tell me. I shall not be offended—but if you would tell them there will be no wedding to-day—nor any day for me,” the white lips quivered,

and the purple eyes grew black with anguish and stricken pride.

“I will do anything you wish,” and there was no touch of cynicism in the grave, low tones. “Leave all to me. Pauline, I can't say anything to comfort you; can do nothing to help either you or your father! Heavens! that I could; but use me as your friend—your slave! Let me stand in the place of a brother and son!”

He paused, and took her cold fingers in his strong, warm clasp.

“Ah! would to Heaven that I could bear your pain!” and into her eyes stole a surprised look, but she only said,—

“You are very good. Please don't think me ungrateful that I say so little. Now go to them, and let no one come to me yet.”

He went out, and she closed and locked the door behind him, then throwing herself upon a couch, lay for a long time with hidden face, scarcely breathing, making no outcry, only the slim, white hands were clenched as in mortal agony, and the little teeth pressed cruelly into the beautiful nether lip.

She rose at last, looking stricken and old, and walked to the window, through which the June sun came in a yellow flood of light, that encircled her form and face, bathed her every limb in its glory; then the stillness of her manner was stirred, and she threw out her hands before her with a low cry,—

“Stuart, Stuart! Oh, heavens! where is the man I loved?”

Later on she heard the sound of carriage wheels, and knew that one by one the guests were departing in silence and pity for her. She thanked them mutely in her heart for their mercy, and when the last sound had died away, she crept upstairs like a guilty thing to her father's room, to find him lying on his bed with Denzil beside him.

“I have taken the liberty to send for Dr. Beck. Don't be alarmed! I think your father has only swooned!”

“Heaven is merciful to him,” she said. “Ah! if I could forget—if I could!”

Oh! that long and terrible day; Pauline thought it would never close. Towards evening Mr. Fossanet implored to be left alone, so she stole out to thank Denzil for his help, and pray him to come on the morrow. Then she went to her room and tried to sleep, hoping so to forget her misery.

But sleep would not come to her, and she lay with wide-open eyes watching the shadows the moon cast about her room. She had not drawn down her blind, and she could see the “Great Bear” and “Orion” in all their splendour, the little fleecy clouds that flickered across the deep blue of the midnight sky; and as she looked, there rose before her mental view a vision so terrible that she covered her eyes, and trembled with sickening fear.

In that hour second sight was mercifully granted her, and she saw her father standing with ghastly face and dilated eyes beside a still, deep, shining pool. He was knee-deep in ferns and grasses.

Ah! she knew the spot well! She had visited it often. His face was turned in the direction of home, and his lips moved as if in farewell.

She tried to convince herself that her mind was overwrought, and strove to think of other things; but the vision came again, only this time her father was preparing for the last fatal plunge.

A cold sweat covered her, and her brain reeled, but she sprang to the floor, and hastily dressing, ran noiselessly to her father's room. The door was open, and her heart seemed to stand still with fear; a moment she leaned her head upon the lintel, sick and giddy, then she went in to find the room empty.

She flew downstairs, slipped bolts and bars with trembling fingers, and passed out swiftly into the pale glory of the June night. On and on, fear lending speed to her feet—on and on, through garden and park, down the long, lovely village street, and out upon the level moor, and then she came to a sudden pause,

because a hand was on her shoulder, and a voice said, entreatingly,—

“Pauline!”

She turned to confront Denzil. For a moment he looked as though he feared for her reason. Her face was white and wild, and a great horror was frozen in the lovely eyes. She was but partially dressed, wore no hat, and her long, black hair streamed all around her, waving in heavy masses about the superb shoulders and supple waist.

“What does this mean?” he questioned, gently, and she, with passionate fear in her voice, answered,—

“My father! Ah! I dare not stay! Come with me if you will, and I will tell you all as we go.”

He hurried on beside her, listening to her wild story, almost wondering she should so believe what seemed to him the cruel fancy of a brain diseased.

Mr. Fossanet was missing, but in all probability he was far nearer home than she; but the young man drew her hand in his arm, and did not attempt to dissuade her from the journey, seeing nothing else would content her.

Still on. The wild flowers fell and died under their hurrying feet, and now the moor was crossed, and they came to a narrow walled between an avenue of trees and shrubs.

Pauline led the way, and Denzil could scarcely follow, so quickly she went. Out of the walk now, and in a little dell where the trees grew so thickly, and the brambles so covered the ground that their clothes were torn, their hands scratched and bleeding. One moment they paused under a low-growing chestnut, and a terrible revulsion of feeling made Denzil blind and giddy for a moment. Before them stretched the pool of Pauline's vision, and there, knee-deep in ferns, stood her unhappy father, his face turned homewards.

“Good Heaven!” he said, and made a forward step, but the woman beside him caught his hand.

“Stay!” she whispered. “Make no noise. If I need you I will call, but don't let him see you yet.”

He bowed in sign of obedience, and stooping very low, screening herself behind bushes and ferns, she crept over the ground, almost afraid to breathe lest her father should hear, and take that terrible plunge before she could reach him.

She was obliged to describe a circle to escape detection, and so was longer in reaching him. Denzil stood watching with bated breath and strained eyes, and suddenly, with an inarticulate cry, like that of a hurt animal, Mr. Fossanet threw up his arms. Denzil sprang forward, but already Pauline had grasped her father's hand, and, throwing herself upon him, prevented that desperate leap.

The violence of the shock was so great that both fell to the ground, and before either could rise the young man had drawn near and stood behind Pauline.

“Father!” she moaned. “Oh, my dear—my dear! come away from this dreadful water! It is I who speak—I, your Pauline! Dear, come with me.”

He lifted himself upon his elbow and looked at her with wild eyes.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, hoarsely, his fingers straying about his throat. “Go home—go home! Leave me alone—leave me alone!” his voice rising to an impotent wail; but she clung to him with tender hands, and in her pity for him—her passionate love—forgot awhile her own woe.

“My dear, it is very late, and we shall be missed. Let me help you to rise. There, that is better. Lean on me—so,” but he feebly answered,—

“I shall not return any more. I came here to end it all. Let me die in peace. I can't bear my shame and misery,” and he tried to thrust her away; but she clung the



closer, frightened by the wildness of his eyes.

"I shall never leave you," she said, in a broken voice. "If you remain here I shall stay to watch by you—to save you from yourself. Heaven sent me to you. Ah, dear, you would not leave me to bear my agony alone?"

But he put her away fiercely.

"Why did you bring him to the house? Why were you so blind? Oh, Heaven! Oh, Heaven!" and broke into a horrible maniacal laugh.

She drew near and kissed him. He turned and would have made his escape, but Denzil sprang forward, seized him in his arms, and held him tightly, despite his frantic efforts for freedom.

In vain he raved, and struck wildly at the dark stern face that, despite its sternness, had a look of pity on it.

He held him so until his struggles grew fainter; then he drew him down, exhausted and breathless, upon the bank, still grasping him by the arm.

"Let me go," and the voice was thin and quavering as an old man's. "Life is too hard. Have pity on me, and let me end it!"

"Sir," gravely and compassionately, "we are here to save you—to take you back. Have you no thought for your daughter? Do you not know her anguish is as keen as yours? Remember how she has forgotten her woe in yours."

"Oh!" cried the white-faced woman beside him, "don't speak of me now," but Denzil was wiser than she in this.

"The man was her lover, and a double portion of the burden falls on her. You must endure to live for her sake. I will not speak of comfort to you now, that would be to mock your grief with empty words; but you must try to hope that in the future some small peace and pleasure may come to you through your child."

But the elder man stretched out his hand and wailed in an imbecile way, broke into gentle sobs, grasped at his daughter's skirts, and buried his stricken face in them.

Gently she disengaged herself from him, then, kneeling, spoke; and Denzil's heart stirred at the tenderness of the rich, low voice that strove to carry in it no tale of personal pain.

"My darling," she said, and laid her cheek to his, "we are waiting—Mr. Ardoyne and I. Let us go home."

"I am very tired," weakly; "do as you like." And they raised him from the ground.

Denzil put an arm about him, and Pauline clasped his right hand with her slim fingers, and little by little they drew him from the spot.

Once Denzil looked into his face. It was vacant and perplexed, as though he strove to remember what had passed, and the young man feared for the girl's future.

"Heaven help her! He is mad!" he thought, and dared not let her see his face, lest she should guess the dreadful truth from him.

Over the solitary moor—moonlit no longer now, for the first rosy flush of dawn had crept over the sky, and here and there a bird, awaking, called on its mate to rise.

"Faster," Pauline whispered, with parched lips, "faster, the village will soon be astir;" and they quickened their steps. Mr. Fossanet complaining feebly that there was no need for haste, and he could not walk so fast as they.

Pauline gave a frightened look into his face, then glanced at Denzil, who would not meet her eyes.

At last they reached Rookwood, and found some of the servants up, they having been roused by the noise Pauline had made in withdrawing bolts; the girl waved them back and half drew, half led her father in; then she turned to Denzil.

"Heaven bless you for your goodness," she said, her weary eyes meeting his a moment; "I want to thank you, but I can't."

He grasped her hand.

"Say nothing more; I could have done no less. Let me stay with you until he is quite calm."

"No, no; you are tired and must have rest; I think he will not be violent again, and I shall not leave him; but you may send Doctor Beck if you will."

Mr. Ainslie called on his old friend, but was told he could not see him; the proud man was ashamed to meet old acquaintances since Stuart's crime, but he clung on to the Rookwood people and found no comfort save in Pauline. It wounded him cruelly that she would not admit him to her father's room, until a mysterious rumour ran through the village and came at last to him. He went at once to Pauline.

"Is this true that they are saying in the village?"

Her face went white as a lily, and the anguish of her eyes smote on his heart, and held him dumb.

"It is true," she said, shivering, "he is mad; and they give no hope of his recovery."

She did not break down, neither cried out nor wept, and Mr. Ainslie could say nothing; he caught up his hat, and drawing it low over his eyes, hurried out with an awful cry in his heart of, "Oh, my son, my son! Oh! worse, far worse than murder."

Then Denzil came, and when he looked into the beautiful anguished face, he cursed himself for his impotence to help her.

"What hope is there?" he asked, retaining her cool white hand in his strong clasp.

"None," she answered, stonily, "he is not dangerous, but he must not be left alone; a keeper is coming to-morrow from Abbeyford Asylum, and Aunt Mary will arrive to-night. Oh! Mr. Ardoyne, how shall I bear my misery?" and suddenly she broke down, and with a wild cry snatched her hand from him and hid her distorted face, and through the room rose the sound of bitter sobbing that unnerved the man beside her, pierced his heart cruelly, and broke down all his self-control.

"For Heaven's sake, don't do that," he said, hoarsely, "I can't bear to hear you. Pauline! Pauline!" but unheeding she sobbed on, and he spoke again. "Don't mind what I said just now," half beside himself at sight of her woe, "if tears will ease your pain, weep till you can weep no more; but oh! it is cruel to see you thus," and suddenly he caught her to his breast and held her there, while his breath fanned the waving hair about the agonised brow.

In her madness she scarce thought his manner strange, only she drew away from him slowly, and his empty arms fell slackly to his sides; and seeing her semi-unconsciousness he urged no excuse for that embrace, which, perhaps, was best.

"Ah! you are kind to me," she cried, between sobs that racked her frame. "You are very kind, my friend," and he caught at that last word.

"Friend! yes; now and always," and again drew near to her all his love in his eyes, if only she could have read that look aright.

Day followed day drearily, and the villagers paused with pitiful eyes to look after "master" as he trod the old ways, a shrunken figure, bowed down and old before his time. Sometimes Burrell, his keeper, walked with him, but generally Pauline, whose dark beauty was dimmed now with watching and woe; whose lovely voice replying to their greetings, was heavy and changed.

"Poor lass!" the simple folks would say, "they have broken her heart between them."

Denzil was her true friend and adviser; for her he denied himself pleasure, stayed on at Mildon House, although it had grown intolerably lonely and desolate now; worked for her, read to her, talked with her, and but for the passion of her pain she must have guessed his love; she had grown dearer than life itself to him; he, the cynic, the scoffer, was comparatively happy if he could but touch her hand,

and listen to the low notes of her most sad, most lovely voice.

Miss Mary Fossanet read him aright, and strove by every means in her power to turn Pauline's heart to him; but the wound was too fresh yet for other love, or thoughts of other love, to intrude. She learned from him that Stuart and Alison had been staying at Lisbon, in the hope of hearing Mr. Fossanet had brought his case into court; but they had gone now, no one knew whither, and if they had heard of his insanity Denzil did not know.

In this way the golden summer sped on, and autumn came; and in those days it sometimes seemed to Pauline that she must die of her misery and outraged love. But she was so strong, and there were so many tasks for her to do, and, perhaps, in the future God had some good in store for her; and so despite her trials she lived on.

No one heard a complaining word fall from the proud, sweet lips, or a harsh note mar the beauty of her voice; only she had suddenly grown very old, every vestige of girlishness had left her, and she was a proud, self-contained woman, who bore her cross in silence and alone.

Many, oh! many a time, when her dark eyes fell upon her father smiling in his imbecility, pleased with things that children love, her heart rose in passionate rebellion against his cruel fate, and the tears welled up; but she would dash them aside with hasty hand, and answer his rambling speech gently, lovingly. Oh, it was sad! and there was no love to comfort her—so then she blindly thought.

Her heart felt stone-cold within her; and the passion that had been part of her life had died out, leaving no anger or scorn, but only a terrible void, a feeling of utter desolation and despair.

All through the dreary winter she watched by and amused her father, received no visitors save Mr. Ainslie and Denzil; was to be seen at church in the old accustomed place, where folks said her face was that of an angel; and now she had won calmness. It was only when Mr. Fossanet sometimes paused and whimpered that Alison would not come to him, or that she was dead, that any sign of anguish crossed the dark etherealised face; then she would clench her hands and fear to breathe, lest a sob should break from her lips.

Oh! what of the woman they had each loved—she, first for her father's sake and then for Alison's own? Where did she wander, and what fate was hers? Her own people had disowned her, and if Stuart wearied of and failed her what would befall her—and Stuart? Oh, Heaven! that a man could be so base!

If she had longed for revenge on either she would have laughed to know that it would soon be hers; but then you see, she had no thought of vengeance, only a supreme loathing of their sin, a shrinking from naming their names even to her own heart.

And Denzil came and went quietly, unobtrusively, performing little services, doing little kindnesses that no one noticed, but that would have been sorely missed had he suddenly ceased them, or gone away.

It was hard work for him to refrain from telling his love, hard not to clasp her to him and kiss the perfect face and mouth, to implore her to come to him that he might teach her forgetfulness, and crown her life with pleasure. Yet he did all this, and was not conscious of the heroism of his conduct; only told himself, most often in the dreary nights, he was not worthy of her, although he had given her all the love and faith of a strong heart.

Ah! one day she would know these things and wonder at her own blindness; one day she would see him as he was, and perhaps—perhaps would crown him with her favour. Who knows?

## CHAPTER V.

EIGHTEEN months since Alison's flight had passed over Pauline's head, bringing very little

change with them, no rest from constant watchfulness, no love to fill the void in her most womanly heart; her father had grown more and more helpless and dependant upon her, but she never grudged him one little care, one tenderness.

She lived a monotonous life, and was never now to be seen in the old haunts; and by and by her name was almost forgotten even by those who had most flattered, most adored her. The doctors unanimously declared that if her father's reason could be restored his bodily health must suffer, and that he would sink gently but surely; she hardly knew which was worst, to lose him by insanity or death; sometimes she told her heart, anything would be better than the almost ceaseless childish babble to which she daily listened until her head ached and her soul grew sick with the horror of it.

It was December and Christmas was drawing near; in happy homes fathers and mothers rejoiced, knowing the dear ones would soon be with them; girls' faces grew bright and flushed rosy as they read words that told he was coming, but no joy came with the season to beautiful Pauline Fossanet.

It was a bright, frosty night, and Denzil had dined with aunt and niece, and now he took up his hat and prepared to go.

"What a lovely night," Pauline said, a little wistfully, and drawing the curtains back stood looking up at the clear, star-lit sky; "it almost tempts one out."

Denzil said hastily: "Let it tempt you quite; come into the grounds with me." The girl hesitated a moment, but Miss Fossanet saying—

"Go, dear, you have not left the house for two days," she went away to fetch a hat and wraps. Side by side they went through the gardens and into the adjoining park, Denzil talking cheerfully and doing his best to interest his companion, who seemed in better spirits than was usual with her of late.

They loitered along under the trees, glittering in the moonlight with their frosty ornaments. Then Pauline said gently,—

"We must be going back."

He was reluctant to return, but scarce dared say so.

They passed through the park gates and by the lodge, went slowly towards the gardens, and were startled to hear swift steps behind them. Pauline turned quickly, to confront the lodge-keeper's daughter, a girl of fourteen. Dropping an extremely rustic courtesy, she said, almost breathlessly,—

"Oh, please, miss, I was just coming to the house. Mother sent me to say a poor woman lies down home, and as she spoke of you afore she fainted, mother thought you would kindly come."

"Return with me," Pauline said to Denzil, and for answer he pressed her dear hand the closer to his side.

With swift steps they walked beside the little maid.

"Do you know the woman, Jenny?" Miss Fossanet asked, quietly, and the girl answered,—

"No, miss; but mother says her face looks familiar-like, and she had a baby in her arms when she fell down outside our door. Mother took it from her, and it was dead," in an awestruck whisper.

With a swift fear in his heart, Denzil pleaded,—

"Don't go, Miss Fossanet, let me be your deputy. I promise faithfully to report all I see or hear."

"No, Mr. Ardoyne; she has asked for me, and I will not refuse her request, poor soul."

They reached the lodge, and were met by the keeper's wife.

"Oh, miss, I'm so glad you've come," she said. "She is conscious now, but has not asked again for you. I am afraid she's very ill, and she isn't a common tramp."

She preceded them to an inner room, and merely saying "The lady has come," went out and closed the door.

Pauline advanced to the sofa, and saw then the slight figure of a woman, whose glistening hair fell loose about a face that in its wanness and woe had no claim to beauty; but from the white face looked out a pair of lovely violet eyes that shrank back ashamed before the dark ones bent upon her. One moment Pauline did not recognise her, but the next, with a passionate cry, she shrank back,—

"Oh, Heaven! you!" And Denzil caught her hand, imploring,—

"Come away; this is no place for you."

"Pauline! oh, Pauline!" wailed the piteous voice, "I wronged you cruelly; but—but I thought when you saw me like this you would pity me. I shan't trouble you long. I'm dying fast. It is for my baby I plead. They have taken her from me. Where is she—my pretty May? Pauline, Pauline! for my child's sake speak to me." But Miss Fossanet still stood apart with eyes full of shrinking horror, and the unhappy woman, rising feebly, crept to her, and grovelled at her feet, tried to clasp her skirts, but Denzil drew Pauline hastily back.

"Go," he said; "it is not fit that she should touch you."

But Pauline did not move, and now Alison's head was bowed to the ground, and her hair fell in glistening masses about the feet of the woman she had so cruelly wronged.

"Ah!" she wailed, "pity me. I am alone, alone in the world, but for my baby. He left me long ago."

Pauline started, but Denzil said,—

"Could you expect other treatment? Don't you know how such guilty unions always end? How dare you ask pity, seeing what misery you have wrought? How dare you return to disgrace more those who loved you so well?"

"Speak on," wailed Alison. "I deserve your scorn. You warned me, would have been my friend; but I was weak, oh! so weak; and, oh, Heaven, how I loved him!"

Then Pauline spoke for the first time, and her voice was strange and husky.

"Don't kneel there," and could not call her by her name. "Mr. Ardoyne, leave us together. I will call you when I am ready to go."

He looked unwilling, but she waved him away with the old imperious gesture he knew so well, and when he was gone, stooping she lifted Alison, and placed her on the couch, sat down at a little distance from her, and said, in a low, strange tone,—

"Why have you sent for me? What good can come of a meeting between us? Oh! in Heaven's name why have you returned to add fresh pain to that which is now so nearly unendurable? Have pity on us, and leave us to ourselves!"

"I shall not stay here; and no one has yet recognised me. But for my child's sake I should not have dared to meet you again; but for her sake I conquered my fear, my anguish of shame. Oh, Pauline! you have never sinned, never fallen away from woman's purity, woman's honour. How should you know the daily remorse I have borne for eighteen months, the madness of the past six months? Do you think I have had any peace, any happiness, since I left my home and soiled your name and mine?"

Pauline shivered through all her being, but spoke no word, and the wretched outcast went on,—

"I have travelled night and day to reach you, to implore your help for my baby, thinking then I would crawl away by myself to die, and so relieve you of the burden of my shame. Oh, Heaven, what will my child's life be?"

And then, oh! the divine pity of it! Pauline knelt down by her, a wave of compassion rushed over her soul for this poor, lost, weak woman, who had been tempted beyond her strength. She took the wasted hands in hers, they were cold as ice, she brushed the wandering golden hair from the haggard face, and when she spoke her voice was low and almost tender.

"Alison," she said, "God has been good

to you; He saw how your sin would be visited upon your innocent child, and he has taken her to himself. She will never know sorrow or shame."

But the mother interrupted her with a fierce cry of anguish,—

"My baby—my baby! oh, take me to her. She will hear me if I call—hear me, and smile into my face. My child—oh, my child!"

In vain Pauline tried to soothe her; her constant cry was for her child, and finding nothing but the sight of the little dead one could satisfy the broken heart, she led her into the room where it lay.

Alison uncovered the waxen face, and kissed it, on brow, and lids, and lips, then snatching it to her breast, held it there as if to impart some warmth to the small, stiff limbs, and cried on it with passionate lament to look at her.

(To be concluded in our next.)

## FACETIÆ.

A HOUSEMAID, boasting of her industrious habits, said she rose at four, made a fire, put on the kettle, prepared the breakfast, and made all the beds, before any one in the house was up.

MUSICAL PARTNERSHIP ON AN EXTENSIVE SCALE.—A musical author being asked if he had composed anything lately, replied quaveringly, "My last work was a composition: with my creditors."

GENY. on horseback to boy on donkey: "Get out of the way, boy—get out of the way—my horse don't like donkeys!" Boy: "Doesn't he? Then why don't he kick thee off?"

A LITTLE girl feeling herself neglected said to her sister: "I think you had better pay some attention to me, for mamma says nobody knows what I'll do next."

AT AN HOTEL.—Visitor: "Waiter, I saw your thumb in this soup as you were bringing it to me."—"Oh, it's of no consequence, sir. It wasn't hot enough to scald me."

"Your son is an actor, you say, Mr. Maginnis?"—"Faith, he is."—"And what rôles does he play?"—"Rolls is it? Faith, he rolls up the curtain."

"You can do anything if you have patience," said an old uncle, who had made a fortune, to his nephew, who had nearly spent one. "Water may be carried in a sieve, if you only wait." "How long?" asked the penniless spendthrift. "Till it freezes," was the cold reply.

LITTLE BROTHER (whose sister is playing cards with a gentleman): "Mr. Smiler, does Minnie play cards well?" Mr. Smiler: "Yes, very well, indeed." Little Brother: "Then you had better look out. Mamma said if she played her cards well she would catch you."

To a lady who once complained of the influence of some coal-heavers, their employer replied by an humble apology on his own account, adding: "But, madam, to tell you the truth, we have failed in our efforts to get gentlemen to undertake the business."

"The artistic taste in Mrs. Z.'s new bonnet is so perfect that you can almost hear it speak," remarked a husband to his spouse.—"Yes," was the reply, "it is certainly very loud."

M. THURMS was an enthusiastic collector of prints. On one occasion, a difference of opinion arising between him and a well-known collector as to whether a print exposed for sale was in the first or second state, the latter, losing his temper in the discussion, observed tartly, "In the matter of engravings, Monsieur Thiers, I am more of a connoisseur than you." "No," coolly replied the future President of the Republic, staring at the other through his spectacles, "you are not, or you wouldn't have said so."



## SOCIETY.

It is now settled definitely that the marriage of Princess Beatrice with Prince Henry of Battenberg will be solemnised at Osborne about July 23 or 24. The ceremony, which will be quite private, will take place in Whippingham Church. The honeymoon will be passed at Quarry Castle, Isle of Wight, the seat of Lady Cochrane, which is close to Osborne House.

THE Duke of Edinburgh has been suffering from an abscess, and although he is making most satisfactory progress His Royal Highness is advised by Sir Oscar Clayton to keep his room for some days yet, and he will therefore be unable for the present to fulfil any engagements.

FANCY dress balls are growing more and more fashionable. One was given the other day in Dublin, which created a great sensation. It was that of Mrs. Proctor, of Merion-square. The hostess, says a contemporary, received her guests as Amy Robsart, in a costume composed of a Court train of ruby velvet, with a front of pearl-coloured satin, embroidered in shaded silks with peacocks, and with pearls. The headdress was the Elizabethan hat in ruby velvet and pearls, and she wore the well-known Amy Robsart collar. Later in the evening she exchanged this dress for a piquant Incurable, consisting of a short white satin petticoat, striped with sapphire-blue velvet, along with a similar velvet coat and hat, and with a white wig and a mane.

Mr. Proctor appeared as the Earl of Leicester in a handsome costume of ruby velvet, slashed with pale pink silk, and embroidered in silver. Mrs. Vincent Jackson was the Queen of Diamonds; and Mrs. Galeworthy made an effective Carmen. This striking dress was composed of a short skirt of brown satin, trimmed with gold and coins; the apron was of Persian embroidery and gold, and the bodice of brown satin and coins, set off with gold armlets and chains.

There were a large number of military and naval officers in uniform; although the movement to the Soudan caused the absence of many familiar faces. The number of guests was about four hundred, and the rooms presented a very brilliant spectacle.

AMONG the most fashionable of modern bridal jewels is the moonstone. The moonstone is a lucky stone, and for that reason a more appropriate gem than either the opal or the pearl, both of which are shadowed by evil traditions. A necklace of beautiful moonstones was recently worn by a bride of noble birth, and made a great sensation by its beauty, as fine moonstones are somewhat rare and expensive. Those of fine quality have a luminous beauty which is exquisitely soft.

THE peeresses' galleries in the House of Lords were crowded during the great debate on the Vote of Censure. Most of the occupants were attired in black. Those present included the Marchioness of Salisbury, the Countess of Seaford, Lady Clanwilliam, Lady Beauchamp, Lady Barrington, and Lady Egmont. The ladies seemed to take the deepest interest in the proceedings.

LORD AVONMORE, whose death from enteric fever in the Soudan on the 13th ult. was recently reported, was a Viscount in the peerage of Ireland, but was not one of the representative peers entitled to a seat in the House of Lords. He had completed his twenty-sixth year two days before his death.

THE grand ball given by the Marquis and Marchioness of Tweeddale, at Yester House, Haddingtonshire, in honour of the birth of a son and heir to the title and estates, was a great success. The ball began at ten o'clock, and at twelve a magnificent supper was served in the great ballroom of the mansion upstairs, about two hundred guests sitting down at the same time.

## STATISTICS.

Russia makes annually 126,000,000 birch and boxwood spoons for the Central Asia market.

CANADA has 4,306 Indian children attending school. The United States has 6,608 Indian children in boarding-schools, and 5,193 in day schools; a total of nearly 12,000.

STATISTICS just published in Holland show that in 1882 24 per cent. of the Dutch nation was convicted for drunkenness. The total population amounts to barely 4,000,000, yet 23,500,000 is annually expended upon drink. Evidently the Dutch love schnaps not wisely, but too well.

As nearly 8,000 new buildings were erected in New York during 1884, it must rank as one of the greatest years of building in the history of that city. It is only six years since the number of new buildings annually has exceeded 2,000, and 2,897, the number registered at the Bureau of Buildings during 1884, is more than the number registered in any previous year. The estimated cost was \$2,292,240, or nearly \$600,000 less than that of the new buildings of 1883, but many very fine structures have been erected.

## GEMS.

THE more perfect the sight is, the more delightful the beautiful object. The more perfect the appetite, the sweeter the food. The more musical the ear, the more pleasant the melody. The more perfect the soul, the more joyous the joys of Heaven and the more glorious to us that glory.

A PLAIN man often looks with envy on one who has risen to place and power; but, if he could see all the steps that have been taken to bring him there, or all the perplexities that surround him now that he is there, he would not barter his present peace of mind for the coveted greatness.

WE have certain work to do for our bread, and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily; neither is to be done by halves or shifts, but with a will; and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FOOD FOR DELICATE INFANTS.—Take a piece of gelatine about one inch square, dissolve it in half a gill of water over the fire, then add a gill of milk. When it comes to a boil, stir in a good half-teaspoonful of arrowroot. When taken off the fire, stir in two tablespoonfuls of cream. This food is suitable for a child four or five months old. As the child becomes older, increase the strength of the food.

OYSTER PATTIES.—Put the oysters in a saucepan, with enough of the liquor to cover them; let them come to a boil; skim well; add two tablespoonfuls of butter for one quart of oysters; season with pepper and a little salt; two or three spoonfuls of cream will add to the richness; have ready small tins lined with puff-paste; put three or four oysters in each, according to the size of the patty; cover with paste, and bake in a quick oven twenty minutes; when done, wash over the top with a beaten egg, and set in the oven two minutes to glaze.

FISH CROQUETTES.—The remains of any cold fish. Remove all skin and bones most carefully, then mash the fish free from all lumps; add a piece of butter, pepper, salt, and mace—and if you have any cold crab or lobster-sauce, so much the better. Form the fish into portions the size and shape of an egg; if too soft, a little breadcrumb may be added. Dip each portion into an egg well beaten up, and then into fine breadcrumb. Fry a golden-brown in boiling lard, drain, and serve on a napkin garnished with fried parsley.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales propose to visit Ireland in April. The Nationalist Press proposes to meet them with claims for the rights of the people.

A GOOD MEAL.—Charles Dickens used to say that he judged the quality of housekeeping by the castors on the table. If the mustard was freshly made, the vinegar cruet stainless, the silver brilliant, and the pepper boxes perpendicular, he expected a good, clean well-served meal, "with behaviour to match." If, on the contrary, the castors were uncleaned, and out of order, he knew what he had to expect, and was seldom disappointed. It is, in truth, simple things that denote quality. The test of a good cook is not the cake she can make, nor the mysterious sauces she can concoct, nor the rich puddings she can produce. A good cook is known by her boiled potatoes, her mutton chop, her roasted joint. Such plain things require personal care and judgment, and are the basis of "a good meal."

CARING FOR PICTURE FRAMES.—There are two kinds of gilt picture frames. One is real gold and will not wash off with water. These may be cleaned by dusting them well with a soft brush and applying a little alcohol or gin to the spots, and they will disappear almost immediately. If to the more common or washable kind a little water is applied carefully with a soft sponge, it will have the desired effect. But be very careful not to reverse these directions. To prevent flies from injuring frames, boil three or four onions in a pint of water; brush the frames once with the liquid. It will not injure the frames, and the flies will not touch them.

TO SQUARE THE SHOULDERS.—Hook the fingers of the hands together; raise the elbows as high as the shoulders and pull like a shoemaker. The muscles about the shoulder blades, to keep them in place, are thus strengthened, and in a short time enabled to fulfil their proper office. When lying on the back press the head on the pillow so as to raise the chest up from the bed on which you are reclining. This strengthens the muscles that should hold the head erect. When standing or sitting, where the head can press against something solid, repeat the operation. By a little thought at other times to use these muscles the difficulty may be overcome.

SUFFERINGS OF THE INDUSTRIAL CLASSES.—The necessity of having to work in masses in the same building, and at the same monotonous, ever-repeating labour, in which the muscles are moving with automatic regularity, and the brain is left unemployed, except to brood over real or imaginary injuries, affects life to the core, and exerts a lasting and injurious effect on the vital value of the manufacturing classes. The agricultural labourer may work hard, fare badly, be housed shamefully, but he has advantages. He is engaged out-of-doors in the fresh air; he has all the beauties of external nature to delight and refresh him. His work is varied. There is the springtime season, with its sheep-washing and shearing; the summer, with its haytime; the autumn, with its harvest; the other months of sowing and ploughing—a constant roundelay of work, with varied change for the mind as well as for the body. The artisan has no such relief. He passes day by day, month by month, year by year, through the same monotonous labour, until at last his mind recognizes but one scene; his hands fall but to one automatic routine. To the end of his career he sees no chance of being made independent by his skill and industry. When we add these difficulties up, the struggle against penury and actual want, the confined dwelling-room, the badly-ventilated, overstocked bedroom, the indifferent couch, the limited sleep, the ever-returning toil, and the rarity of wholesome relaxation, either of mind or body—when we add up all these difficulties, we have before us evidence of vital strain, which practically is resisted longer than, at first sight, we could imagine to be compatible with human endurance.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**W. G. G.**—We are unable to give you the desired information as we do not know the name of the party.

**D. C. B.**—Try to improve your fortune so as to be able to marry as soon as possible. This is the only way to end your perplexity.

**THOMA.**—For chapped hands: Mix together equal quantities of rich cream and strong vinegar, and rub it over your hands every time you wash them.

**MARTIN F.**—Nothing but frank intercourse with independent minds, nothing but discussion on equal terms, will strengthen your powers of rhetoric and logic. Join a debating society.

**L. R.**—Your friend had better take the advice offered by you. Her parents would feel very much grieved by her imprudence. No good can come of this correspondence, and possibly much misery.

**W. M. J.**—It might be well for you not to let your betrothed kiss you too often. "Whenever he wants to" is too unlimited. A little affectionate discipline now and then should be exercised.

**R. T. A.**—Tell her, in a delicate way, that you love her and want her for your wife, and at the same time ask her if she loves you. You will then be sure to find out whether she does or not.

**F. M. N.**—At thirty-seven you had better not marry a boy of twenty-one. You may safely assume that such a marriage would be unfortunate. Wait until you are sought by one nearer your own age. Treat your youthful admirer as a son.

**F. W. W.**—You are a mere girl and have plenty of time to acquire the ways of good society. Do not be at all discouraged. You will get over your awkwardness and bashfulness in a couple of years. Endeavour to go into society whenever suitable opportunity offers.

**AMY.**—We can be thankful to a friend for a few acres, or a little money, but there are greater things than these; and for the freedom and command of the whole earth, and for the great benefits of our being, our life, health and reason, we look upon ourselves as under no obligations.

**R. R.**—You should wait until an opportunity offers to show him that you still regard him as a friend. Do not be too humble or apologetic. Let him seek you and manifest a wish to be restored to favour. Although you are at fault you must maintain your maidenly dignity. Do not be so capricious in future.

**M. S. J.**—We think that you had better let the young lady alone. It is not necessary for you to mention the matter to the young lady's parents. They probably already know of your offer and how it was received. The young lady regards you as a boy. It is foolish to think of marriage until you are able to support a wife.

**THOMA.**—You can only acquire the art of conversation by conversing. Speak with a little deliberation; and, even in transacting the most commonplace affairs of life, take pains to express yourself concisely, clearly, and correctly. You only need practice, for you seem able to convey your meaning freely and accurately in writing.

**A. F. B. W.**—The nearest of kin of the deceased person is entitled to administer the estate, if there is no valid objection to him or her, rendering the appointment improper. The estate can be distributed just as if the heirs or legatees were all adults, and the surrogate may appoint some other person than the father as guardian of the minors, if he is of the opinion that the father is unfit to execute the trust.

**CELA M.**—Transparent show bills may be cemented to glass windows in the following manner: Very fine white glue or preferably clean parchment chippings boiled in distilled water in glass or enamel until dissolved must be applied very evenly with a soft hair brush to the face of the bill. Then press it on the glass, and in a few minutes the bill will be firmly fixed. Glass may be fixed to glass in this way, and the cement will bear a good deal of dry heat.

**L. V. D.**—The following verses would make an appropriate little speech:

The Queens, who rule by right divine,  
Can rule as suits their pleasures,  
But she who wears a crown like mine,  
Commands by gentle measures.

To make the merry evening speed,  
To cause no loving subject pain,  
To give each gallant knight his meed,  
Is all the object of my reign.

**L. C. G.**—So far as we remember, the first very distinguished singer who sang "Home, sweet home" in concert was Jenny Lind. The song was composed by John Howard Payne, in the early part of the present century, and was very popular wherever the English language is spoken. It was sung by many concert singers in this country before Jenny Lind went to the United States in 1850, but her singing of it gave the song such unexampled popularity that it has ever since been associated with her name.

**C. R. D.**—When the first letter was written, or who the inventor of writing was, is a problem hidden in the unfathomable obscurity of the early ages; and, indeed, in all probability, the art of writing was never invented at all, but grew up out of the symbols and hieroglyphics which were used as a means of communication, just as

sculpture, painting and poetry slowly ripened from the faltering essays of primitive man into glorious fulness and beauty. The first notice of a written letter appears in the second book of Samuel, where we are told that David wrote a letter to Joab, commanding him to "set Uriah in the fore front of the hottest battle, and retire from him, that he might be smitten and die."

**KITTY.**—Hoarseness can be removed temporarily by dissolving in the mouth a small piece of borax, about the size of a green pea, or about three-fourths of a grain, and slowly swallowing it. It produces a profuse secretion of saliva, and affords relief. Good for singers or speakers.

**GEOFFREY.**—It is said that a piece of lemon bound upon a corn will relieve it in a day or so. It should be renewed night and morning. The free use of lemon-juice and sugar will always relieve a cough. A lemon eaten before breakfast, every day, for a week or two, will entirely prevent that feeling of lassitude peculiar to the approach of spring. These valuable properties of the lemon should be better known.

**EMMA.**—The effect of velvet is good in absorbing the light and massing the shadows. Plush, on the contrary, is thick and ungraceful. All rough materials add to the size and breadth of the figure, and consequently, only those with a smooth surface should be chosen by the stout and tall, leaving the others for people who need both breadth and length. Plaids and stripes should be avoided by the tall and stout.

**A. M. C.**—To make boiled apple custard take six apples, one teaspoonful of flour, five drops of essence of lemon, two eggs, a small piece of butter, half a pint of milk, a quarter-pound of sugar. Stew the apples, and when heated beat to a pulp, having added the essence of lemon and some sugar. Let it cool. Then mix the milk, eggs, butter, and flour, and beat all well. Then add the apples. Put all into a pudding-mould, and let it boil one and one-half hours. Serve cold with milk.

## MARGUERITE.

Some idle hours, some verses; 'ent  
In lines of rhyming compliment.  
Mere trifles they—by love well meant.

But Marguerite is coy to please.  
"Write me," said she, "lines like to these,  
Grand old Miltonic symphonies."

"Know you," said I, "that in the heart  
That's wholly dedicated to art,  
Woman can have but little part!"

"Alas! 'tis true," said Marguerite,  
Low lying idly at my feet,  
"Write me but such dross verses sweet."

B. B.

**ROSE.**—For oyster sauce parboil the oysters in their own liquor, beard them, and reserve all the liquor. Melt a piece of butter in a saucepan, add a little flour, the oyster liquor, and enough milk to make as much sauce as is wanted. Put in a blade of mace and a bay-leaf tied together, pepper and salt to taste, and the least dust of cayenne. Let the sauce come to the boil, add the oysters, and as soon as they are quite hot remove the mace and bay-leaf. Stir in a few drops of lemon-juice, and serve.

**M. N. P.**—The thimble is a Dutch invention that was first brought to England in 1695 by one John Lofting, who began its manufacture at Illington, gaining thereby both honour and profit. Its name was derived from the words thumb and bell, being for a long time called thumbs, and only lately thimbles. Old records say that thimbles were at first worn on the thumbs; but we can scarcely conceive how they could be of much use there. Formerly they were made of brass and iron only, but of late years, steel, silver, gold, horn, ivory, and even pearl and glass, have all been used for making thimbles.

**CINTRA.**—The very large fans that were in vogue a year or two ago, and even during last summer, if old and discoloured, can be turned to account as wash-stand-splashes, by being spread out to their full extent and fixed, covered with cretonne or sprigged muslin over colour, and fastened against the wall, handle upwards. A large bow is tied around the handle. If no fans are available, and the cheap Japanese ones are unobtainable, the shape is cut out in cardboard and covered. It intended as a gift, the nightdress case, made to match, often accompanies it. These covered fans are also to be seen, in richer materials, in the drawing-room, with a bag pocket. A wire is fixed round the edge, and the back hidden by paper or cretonne.

**G. S. W.**—There are at least a dozen species of fishes which are alone among animals in the possession of electric organs—truly the most remarkable weapons in the entire animal armoury. The application of electricity to the arts is one of the proudest achievements of nineteenth-century men; yet those fishes, there is little reason to doubt, applied their electric battery to the art of capturing their prey long before man had come into existence. That these natural batteries exhibit true electric phenomena is shown by their currents behaving in exactly the same way as those produced artificially; thus, says Günther, "they render the needle magnetic, decompose chemical compounds, and emit the spark." To receive a shock, it is necessary in the one apparatus as in the other that contact should be made at two points in order to complete the circuit

The various species of electrically armed fishes are not as might have been expected, from the common possession of so unique a weapon, by any means all closely related. They belong to three widely different groups—namely, rays, eels and sheath-fishes—which would seem to indicate that electric organs have originated independently in each group. The electric eel of South American waters is the most powerful of creatures, growing to a length of six feet, and provided with a pair of batteries containing some hundreds of minute cells copiously supplied with nerves.

**S. S. M.**—Under the circumstances which you describe your own escort was certainly entitled to the preference, and you should have asked him to accompany you, instead of requesting the other gentleman to do so.

**C. C. S.**—If you should let the young lady entirely alone for a few months she would probably come to a positive decision in the matter. Your fear that she is trying to make a fool of you may have some foundation in fact, but her indignation when she heard that she had shown a little courtesy to another girl proves that she is not entirely indifferent to your attentions.

**W. M. M.**—Let the young man show a little more enterprise. It is his place to do the wooing, and until you are sought you are debarred by custom and the modesty natural to your sex from showing too great a desire for his company and attentions. If you are discreet he will soon find a way to make himself agreeable to you. Invite him to call when a proper occasion offers.

**D. B. G.**—Receipts for holding waste paper or a piece of handwork can be made from a small-sized Japanese parasol, half-opened, and kept out by means of a wire run along inside, and a bright ribbon twisted in an out and round each other point outside. The top is fixed into a small stand of black or vermilion-painted wood, and the handle, which is uppermost, is bound over with coloured satin or velvet ribbon, finished off with a cluster of hanging loops, and an artificial bird or spray of grass and feathers to one side. A fall of lace is sometimes added, or a hanging pom-pom from every alternate point. These small-sized coloured paper parasols can be varied in colour, in the shape of stand, and mode of trimming. For ladies they sell very well.

**CARRIE G.**—A man violates no law human or divine by changing the orthography of his name, or even the entire name itself, so long as he does not misrepresent the facts for the purpose of gaining something by false pretences. There is no legal obstacle to one who is known as Alexander Montgomery changing his name to Peter Brown on a given day of any year of our Lord and calling himself, and all his family after him, by this shorter appellation. The law provides a method by which a person who wishes to put such a change on record in the statutes may effect that object, but this is only to facilitate the searching of titles to property, etc., which might be embarrassed when there is a public recognition of the alteration. There is nothing requiring such a record, nor preventing any one from changing the first, middle, or last names of himself and all his household at a very early hour or any day of the week he may select for this purpose, and insuring that every one shall address him and them by the new title.

**W. G. W.**—Many of the common advertising almanacs are very untrustworthy. If you examine a carefully compiled almanac you will usually find the statements made that the times of sunrise and sunset are given for a certain latitude in mean time, which differs from apparent solar time very considerably. If you correct the figures given in mean time by the difference between that and apparent time, you will find that the forenoon and afternoon agree in length, to the minute, which is as close as the figures given in the almanacs enable you to compute. The times of sunrise and sunset given in any almanac can only be correct for one degree of latitude; if you are north or south of this, you must add or subtract, according to the season and your position. For instance, near the longest or shortest day of the year, one degree of difference in latitude makes a difference in the time of sunrise of over six minutes. The diagrams, in any elementary text-book of astronomy, will make this clear to you; but without diagrams it would be impossible to explain the matter clearly in any reasonable space.

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